

MORE STORIES WRITTEN BY ANONS, INSPIRED BY
THE UNIVERSE OF DOCTOR WHO

SARAH JANE LIVES
EIGHTFOURFIVESIXSEVEN
GENEROUS LENGTH OF TWO METRE INCH



SHIT TRIPS

VOLUME 2.5



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Foreword

After /who/'s first two Shit Trips anthology volumes of Doctor Who short fiction, the idea came about for an interim volume with a specific theme. That theme was alternate Doctors, spin-offs, and companion-focused stories.

This is that volume. This is **Shit Trips 2.5**.

Formatting was generally made uniform between stories for consistency across the anthology - paragraph spacing, normalising dinkuses as the marker for section breaks, font choice, and so on. Exceptions were made for stories where specific formatting had particular importance (*Relative Dimensions*, *A Burgpreppach Missive*, *Steamed Looms*). Regional differences (British or American spelling, single or double quotation marks) were not altered. Spelling errors picked up by autocorrect were corrected. Apart from that, stories were left completely untouched.

A "What if...?" logline was added to every submission. This was to give readers an idea about the story, and to encourage exploring the volume as according to what takes a reader's fancy. The framing story was not given any loglines as its purpose was to frame the stories in the order they're listed in. Some sequences of stories have continuity between them and are best read in order (*Perfect Authentic Cadence* through *Friends, Lovers or Nothing*, and *The Revolution Games* through *Happy Birthday Son!*), but the majority of stories can be read in absolutely any order.

While much thought was put into the structure of the anthology and specific ordering of submissions, readers are encouraged to explore the anthology however they'd like, with the "What if..." loglines hopefully proving useful.

Thank you to all writers and readers.

Framing Story: Part 1

The Tape Room

by Gallifrey Immigrant

Gwen stared at the weird house in front of her. It was a very old house, built on the blood of her father's life. This place had been indebted to her, or at least it was supposed to be. The Shadow that lived in the house had stopped that, though. It had haunted her thoughts, had haunted her mind.

Opening the door, she walked in slowly. As she expected, the woman from her past was here. Not the Shadow, the other one. The one who called herself the Doctor.

Her skin was dark, darker than she remembered. Bright green eyes pierced through the darkness, erupting the fog inside Gwen's head. A black leather jacket overlaid a blue shirt, and yellow pants. It looked a bit garish, to be honest.

"Gwen, I told you not to come here," said the Doctor.

"I needed to come here. Torchwood needs answers," said Gwen.

(Torchwood? What was that? She couldn't remember, but it felt important.)

"Torchwood never knows how to leave anything alone. Some doors shouldn't be opened," said the Doctor.

Her father had told Gwen that he had built a secret within the house. A door that led to wonders beyond imagination, and that she could open it, but she could never leave it open for longer than a day, lest horrible events would occur. He refused to show her the door, saying that it would only show up when she was of age, but she often saw him enter the house, and stay for long periods of time.

One day, something went wrong.

He suddenly ran to her room, and dragged her out of the house. Something was following them, something large. As he pushed her out the door, a black claw grabbed his chest, and dragged him inside. The last thing she saw, before the door closed, was a large Shadow with yellow irises staring at her.

Hours later, the Doctor found her. The Doctor was with some group called UNIT or other, and with her blue flowing cape and red hair, had made her feel as welcome as she could. But Gwen never forgot the house, and now it was time to find the door. Now it was--

“Gwen! Stop sleeping on the job, newbie” called out Owen, waking Gwen from her weird dream. “We’re here.”

Gwen shook her head, trying to wake up. Torchwood had gotten a message at their base, notifying them about lost tech. There was a few thing weird things about that:

A) Torchwood’s location was supposed to be super-secret.

B) The note was in Jack’s handwriting.

“I didn’t write that,” Jack had immediately told everybody.

“Sure you didn’t do that while you were drunk?” Ianto had asked.

Jack had laughed, but Gwen thought she had seen fear in his eyes. Not a lot seemed to scare that man, but the idea that he did something he didn’t know about did. Why?

No matter what, Torchwood had to investigate the note. It had been longitude-latitude numbers, attached to some sort of device. It looked like a camera, well half-a-camera, but incomplete. Ianto had said that the technology within was extremely advanced, more advanced than anything on Earth. Something about the whole thing annoyed Gwen—this whole situation (“mysterious alien tech, note with Jack’s name on it”) felt too convenient. And now the creepy dream...

“This feels like a trap,” said Gwen out loud.

Owen laughed. “It’s probably a trap. Not sure why someone would do that, though.”

“Does Torchwood have a lot of enemies?” asked Gwen. “People who might have something to gain from setting us up? Political enemies?”

“Nope. We either kill our enemies, or arrange them for life in prison” said Owen. He grinned at her, and she couldn’t tell if he was joking.

They approached the location that the note had listed. In front of them was a wooden barn, colored black, except for a red handle on the door. No one besides the Torchwood team was around for miles, and Gwen could hear the sound of wind rustling through the tall grass. She could feel the heavy tug of the half-made camera, stuffed in a bag on her shoulder. Jack followed them from the rear, and Gwen could have sworn she had saw

him checking out her arse. He seemed pleased, which made her oddly happy. She wasn't sure that was a good thing.

"This barn is the magic spot? Doesn't look like much," said Jack. He stuffed his hands in his pockets, peering at the barn. He touched the door with his hand, and then quickly drew it back.

"Ow! Felt like a hot stove!" said Jack.

Owen placed a finger on the door, and shook his head. "Feels cool to the touch to me."

Jack frowned. "Alright. Let's get this over with."

Owen nodded. "Newbie, wanna do the honors?"

"Why me?"

"Ladies first," said Jack.

"And because if an evil raptor jumps out and eats you, then Torchwood will have lost the member with the least experience. It's simple utilitarianism," added Owen.

Gwen rolled her eyes, and opened the door. The handle hummed under her hands, and as she twisted it, it seemed to melt under her hands.

And then they were in a different place altogether. The room was filled with VHS tapes. Countless tapes, as far as the eye could see. Except for a space in the middle of the room. In that space, was what looked like a projector, but only half-made.

"What the bloody hell is going on?" asked Owen.

Jack winced, and said "This whole place feels weird. Like I'm on pins and needles."

He walked to the half-made projector, and looked back at the half-made camera on the floor. Then he looked at Gwen, and said "Ever play Lego?"

It took a few minutes, but they eventually got the camera hooked up to the projector. As one unit, the device looked like some weird mixture of an old daguerreotype and a modern film camera, with wires and projector lenses mixed in with an odd candle-light system. On the bottom was a VHS player, probably meant to play all the tapes lying around.

"Looks like, umm, steampunk. That's what she would have called it," said Owen.

"Who?" asked Gwen.

He opened his mouth and said “I...don’t know.”

A frown spread across his face. “Hang on. I feel like I should know this name. To...”

A quick flash of a face came into Gwen’s mind, then disappeared. Odd. This whole place was odd.

Then the camera booted up, on its own. On the far wall, an image was projected of an Asian woman with a spherical face, wide blue eyes, and an intense stare. Her face felt familiar somehow, but Gwen couldn’t place it.

“Hello. My name is Tosh Sato. Right now, if you’re in here, then I’ve failed. I am a part of your team, but you’ve forgotten me. All of you have forgotten me. These tapes are the key to finding me. Each tape you watch will unlock part of this house. After watching enough tapes, you’ll be allowed to leave. I am in one of the rooms. Please find me. Whatever has kept you all from remembering me doesn’t want you to see these tapes. Please find me.”

The projected image turned to static. Gwen felt a stabbing pain for a moment, and the image went black.

Then, from Owen, “So we’re definitely watching these tapes, right?”

“Feels too convenient. And how could we forget a member that we have?” said Gwen.

Jack shrugged. “I’ve heard weirder. And the room’s completely locked solid, with no doors. If watching the tapes are a way to leave...”

Gwen paced around the room. Brick walls, flat with no markings, were on all sides. The brick felt warm to the touch, like this place had central heating. As she walked, she noticed that the VHSs had silly titles like “The Revolution” or “The Doctor’s Big Dong—it’s not what you think!”. What sort of videos were these? A small part of her feared they had come across some perv’s private collection of shag videos.

“Owen, what are you doing?”

Jack was glaring at Owen, who had picked up a video tape and was about to plug it in.

“What? The woman said if we want to get out, we need to see the tapes.”

“We don’t even know what’s on them.”

The image turned back on.

“These videos contain the events of other universes. What could be, what can be, and what can’t be. This isn’t just an actual recorder, but a look into the minds of other people. You may even see yourself in these tapes. Do not be disturbed: none of it happened.”

Then the image closed again.

“Well then, that explained nothing at bloody all,” said Owen. “Well, O Glorious Leader Jack? Should we start up the vids?”

Jack looked at Gwen. “What do you think?”

Gwen said “Not sure we have a choice. Let’s see what happens.”

Jack nodded. He looked at Owen, and said “So which one do we start with?”

As Owen pushed the VHS into the player, Gwen suddenly realized that she had seen this room before, not too long ago. She had seen this room in the dream she had, right before coming over here.

And as the story started, Gwen thought she saw a Shadow in the side of her eye. But it was just a trick of the light.

Clyde

by Morphant

What if Clyde grew up?

The last time Clyde had saw his dad was back at Bannerman Road, during the situation with the Berserker. That was a memory he had tried his hardest to suppress, but always somehow ended up in his dreams.

When Aunt Mel called to tell him his dad had been involved in a motorbike accident, it surprised him how well he had taken it. He thanked her for letting him know and wished his father well, and continued working on the album cover he had been commissioned to design. By the end of that night, he was searching through flights to Berlin, wondering how much of a dent a two-day trip would make in his schedule. So upon Mel's second call of the day – to tell him that Paul Langer had passed at 12 minutes past 10 at night, Central European Summer Time – he had never wished more that Sarah Jane was still alive, waiting comfortably for him in the attic of 13 Bannerman Road.

But she wasn't alive. She had died nearly ten years ago. And there was nothing in that old attic: she had dedicated anything of worth to Broden New Town, the town that had been built on the edge of what used to be Foxgrove, and anything alien had been collected by UNIT. Now living in Greenwich, Clyde hadn't been back to that street in years, but he suspected that old house could never have the charm it once had without that incredible woman inside its walls.

He found himself walking off his estate and away. He didn't go for walks – he drove everywhere he needed to be. Without even having considered it, he had left the flat and started walking and had no idea where to go or why, but he didn't turn to go back in. Instead, after about five minutes of walking through the dark and having reached a street lamp-lit section of greenery with a bench that had a plank missing from its seat, he pulled out his phone and searched for Rani Chandra's number.

At one point, a couple of years ago, the two had found each other on Facebook. Rani had Luke's phone number and inspired him to make an account, and eventually they had group conversations. What they had found, though, was what adults always find when getting back in touch with the best friends they'd ever had. They had nothing in

common anymore. Conversations with those two – the greatest people he'd ever known, people he'd still, to this day, trust with his life – were just trips down memory lane. They'd have lengthy chats about the Slitheen, the Trickster, Sarah Jane and the Doctor. But they were nothing more than chats, and eventually they'd have to end and they'd become 27-year-olds again, working hard to make a living. Sometimes he wished the Doctor would drop into their lives one day and give them all something new to talk about. One day.

Rani's number was an old one. 'The number you have called is not available,' the voice in the mobile speaker told him. Yeah. Unavailable.

Once again, Clyde found himself walking – back home, this time. Home to draw and sleep. He'd have to make preparations for the funeral. Call a couple of relevant clients, extend some deadlines. And – oh God – he supposed his mum should know. Even now, after all these years, he knew it would break her heart.

The door slammed harder than Clyde had expected, and it was at that point he realised he was angry. But he was also tired. He was too tired to be angry, so he settled for crying on the sofa instead of fighting.

Ping

Clyde turned his head towards the laptop on his desk.

Ping, ping

He was receiving messages. Facebook messages. He lifted the lid and opened the chat box to see Maria Jackson's face, along with two messages from Luke and Rani. Maria had joined the conversation less than five minutes ago, he had noticed, scrolling up:

Dad's got a thing, she wrote, and he wants some help. It's a big ask, but I don't know anyone better for the job. There are time-spacial hotspots across the planet – Cardiff, St. Petersburg, Jerusalem – called rifts. We've traced rift energy in Washington, and it's opening up in a major way. People falling through from other time zones, other planets. We've got money to book your tickets, we just need you here.

Clyde lent back in his chair and swore under his breath.

I can make time, Luke wrote.

And me, Rani told her. When do you want us by?

Tomorrow night. Pack a bag.

Mental. Utterly mental! Clyde had no social life, lived on the edge of poverty, and his father's funeral was a week away in a foreign country. He'd barely been given time to consider himself and here he was, stuttering out curse words and shaking with anticipation.

So it looked like he was going to fight aliens in Washington D.C. and pay his respects to Paul Langer in Berlin in the same week.

It's nice to hear from you Maria, Clyde wrote. All of you. You have no idea.

So, are you in? Luke asked.

Yeah, he thought.

I'm in.

Rani

by Morphant

What if Rani grew up?

Rani was the chief investigative journalist for the Daily Mail.

Her father had never been too keen on her choice of paper, but you take what's available, Dad, she told him time after time. It wasn't even the paper he disliked – it was the time they slated a school while he was still the headteacher there. To be fair to him, it wasn't the school's fault that Tommy Graham had set the science department on fire. Although it might have been Mrs McDermott's fault for providing an ADHD pupil with a Bunsen burner and a flannel.

She hadn't made it out of home, yet. Her mum wanted her to live there forever – more than what could be said of Haresh – but Rani certainly didn't. It was just a matter of low pay and excessive cost of a flat in Ealing. And frankly, the prospect of moving too far away from her mum terrified her. Not for Rani's own sake; she could take care of herself with absolutely no problem. It was her mum she worried about. As if flowers weren't already her life, she'd have nothing else left to care for.

Some nights, Rani stared across at that old house and dreamed. She'd stopped crying over it some time ago now, but only on the outside. It just so happened that the tears didn't make it out of her eyes anymore. She had cried herself out of tears for Sarah Jane Smith.

Not that Sarah Jane would have wanted her to cry, anyway. In fact, Rani hoped she'd be proud of where she was now. She could hear her, sometimes: "It's not easy, these days, moving away from home. No need to rush yourself, take all the time you need. And you know I'll always be here when you need me."

Rani wished Sarah Jane was still there when she needed her, waiting comfortably for her in the attic of 13 Bannerman Road.

There was one night ... damn it, she was going to cry now. She had never told anyone about this. There was one night, over two years ago, that she was working on a piece

about a haunted house in Glasgow. She met a man there, and was sure he was mental. The strangest part of the interaction with him was not the ridiculously long scarf (she rather liked that) nor the explorer hat (not so much), but the fact that she felt so comforted when he grinned at her. It was the smile of a madman who had successfully mastered the skill of feeling nothing but love and euphoria.

“Journalist?” he asked her with wide eyes.

“What’s it to you?” she responded, defensively.

“Oh, I think you’ll find it’s more of a matter that you see you find your way out of here with no harm done to yourself or others, don’t you?” he said. Or something as incoherent as that, anyway.

Rani just examined him. Was he a ghost? She quickly realised she had questioned that out loud.

“You’ll find no ghosts in here, Journalist. Just little old me. Well, little old us.”

And from him, that was that. He flicked his head to the side and grinned at her and marched forward, in the opposite direction to which he had come.

But then she saw her ghost.

Sarah Jane tailed that man, running slightly to keep up with his long, excited strides. She was excited too, and young – so young. “Wait for me,” she said.

Rani really was crying now. She was sat on the edge of her bed and felt her face distort into a grimace of hot, wet, salty tears. She ran away from Sarah Jane, faster than she had ever run, and spent that night in her hotel crying as hard as she was now. She never finished that piece.

She cried because she knew, and she wished she knew at the time, that the Sarah Jane in that old house in Glasgow was not a ghost. She was Sarah Jane from the 1970s, and that insane man with his love and euphoria was the Doctor. That one and only chance to have her life mean something again, blown by her natural instinct to run from something she couldn’t comprehend. After all the things she’d seen, she ran from a ‘ghost’ of someone she loved and missed more than anything.

Her phone had been buzzing with messages for the past couple of minutes but she ignored it and buried her head in her pillow. Three more times she felt it vibrate before getting the urge to lob it against the opposite wall, but of course she didn't. She opened her lock screen to ten new messages – messages from Luke and Clyde, and Maria Jackson.

Dad's got a thing, Maria wrote, and he wants some help...

Luke

by Morphant

What if Luke grew up?

Mum probably wouldn't have approved of his newest application. There was an element of hypocrisy in that, he thought. The fact that Sarah Jane had held Luke from UNIT at arm's length all his life hadn't bothered him until recently.

They'd been contacting him since university, obviously. Luke was unashamedly a genius, he was exactly the sort of person the taskforce needed – the type of person they hadn't seen the likes of since the 70s. But this time, it intrigued him.

He had opened an email from Kate Lethbridge-Stewart – the daughter of the Brigadier, presumably – and it didn't feel as official as the others had. For the last eight years, UNIT had been sending him automated emails with a link to an application form at the bottom. Every experience he had ever had with them felt so robotic that to receive an email from a real human, who used her words to entice him, was exciting. Appealing, even.

"Too many guns," he heard his mother's voice say.

"But it's science, mum," he said out loud, knowing full well that he was talking to himself and that this was a pointless exercise. "I'm not at risk if I join them for science."

K-9 wagged his tail and his head crept upwards. Luke had forgotten he was in the room. "Master?"

"Ignore me, K-9. It's nothing."

"My senses indicate you were holding internal dialogue with Mistress Sarah Jane. This is a human trait signifying indecisiveness."

Luke shook his head and turned back round on his spinning chair, facing his laptop. "And when I want your opinion I'll ask for it."

He heard K-9's motor whir, wheeling himself backwards slightly, and he turned his head back downwards. But the damned dog's tail was still wagging.

"May I remind you, Master, that I am capable of holding intellectual conversations."

Luke was reading the email for the umpteenth time and looked back at his metal dog. He had been unfairly harsh to him tonight – and recently, probably. "Sorry, K-9," he said. "It's just stress. You're a good dog."

K-9's ears rotated, and he moved his head forward into Luke's waiting hand.

"Affirmative, Master."

Currently, Luke worked for an organisation that was looking to publicise nanotechnology and apply it to the National Health Service. The nanogenes would save hundreds of thousands of lives, and that wasn't a project he wanted to leave behind. But the Ministry of Defence was already rearing its ugly head. The CEO of said organisation had been in talks with the Prime Minister, and over the last couple of weeks the drive to provide for the NHS had not been the central focus of their work. This must have been how Lancelot de Mole felt. Very few people invent something with the intent to harm, but when you create something as useful to governments as the tank had been, how much good was it truly going to be used for?

If he dropped out of the project, it would certainly slow down the production of the nanogenes and would prevent them from being used for a few years, at least. In that time, if someone willing were to leak bits of information, there would be activism on a huge scale. The United Nations would be forced to regulate something. Maybe he'd be saving lives by leaving the organisation rather than staying on.

This application at UNIT was big. It was vital to the rest of his life, no matter how Sarah Jane would have felt. Besides, he'd already decided it was hypocritical of her. UNIT was 'different' way back when, but they were still military, and they still used guns. Just because the Doctor had some kind of influence, doesn't mean they were any better than they are now. And if Luke were to become as influential as the Doctor had – which he was almost bound to – he'd be able to make changes after so long, anyway. And he got the impression that was what this Kate Lethbridge-Stewart had in mind too.

An email came through from UNIT at the same time as he received a message alert. He shivered, for the first time in a long time. The message was from Maria – he skim-read: */ don't know anyone better for the job.*

Holding his mobile phone in one hand, Luke clicked on the email.

CONFIDENTIAL:

Your application with the Unified Intelligence Taskforce has been approved...

Luke breathed slowly outward. His heart was racing. Too much all at once.

I can make time, he wrote.

“K-9, have you ever been to Washington?”

Framing Story: Part 2

Escape to Danger

by Neo

Owen ejected the tape labelled “Luke” and placed it atop the two others they’d viewed before it. He’d made a show out of finding two matching tapes to the first they’d watched, and seemed keen to take charge of proceedings within the barn.

“I know that boy,” said Jack, frowning, too caught up in the content of the tapes to make any comment on Owen taking command.

“That was beautiful,” said Gwen. Those tapes had reminded her so much of how her schoolyard relationships had fared over the years.

“Forgive me for not being as moved as you lot, but what exactly did those tapes have to do with anything? What’d that message at the start say - events of other universes, look into people’s minds, none of it happened?”

“You may even see yourself in these tapes,” said Gwen, remembering. She was missing something, she could feel it. Some memory. Some dream.

“Wait, weren’t these supposed to unlock parts of the house?” asked Owen.

Gwen looked around. Brick walls, flat with no markings. No secret doors had opened. No hidden passageways. Stacks and shelved of tapes were everywhere, but nothing else.

“Guess not,” said Gwen.

Owen shrugged, then turned his back to her and started sorting through one of the shelves of tapes. Jack got up and started looking through the crates of tapes they’d been sitting on. Gwen sighed, and began to follow their lead.

Most video tapes were just strewn about, many without cases at all, but others were fitted together snugly in long boxes, like they were part of a series. One particularly long box had nine tapes fitted in it. Strangely, there seemed to be no opening to it, like the whole thing was fitted closed around the tapes.

Gwen pulled it down from its shelf to show the others, when she heard a clatter as other tapes fell down the back of the shelf. She dropped the long case and scrambled to grab what tapes towards the back of the shelf she could before they all slipped away.

As she examined the tapes she managed to catch, she noticed they had a word in common, scrawled across their cases - Nilso.

"The Nilso Doctors," she read aloud to herself, noticing further sentences shared across the tapes in her hands. "Jack, I think you'll want to see this. I think I've found tapes of your Doctor."

"What? Bring them over here!"

Gwen did so, huffing at Jack's tone. She glanced over the tapes in her hands. A few were labelled as the Nilso Doctors, but others had scrawlings of Bowie lyrics across the front. A dusty post-it covered one of those tapes. Gwen couldn't make out all the words - something about a later revised release completing the set.

As she reached out to give the tapes to Jack, Owen snatched them away and shoved one into the makeshift VCR player.

"Avoiding a fight, that's all," said Owen as both Gwen and Jack opened their mouths to complain. "You know we'd end up watching it anyway."

Gwen was going to give Owen an ever bigger piece of her mind for presuming her actions like that, when she saw something move out the corner of her eye. Something wrong.

A Shadow. Moving closer, as the room grew darker, folding into the encroaching shadows like a puddle brazenly growing beyond its bounds in the rain.

Memories started flooding back. Memories of a house, a door, a father, a Doctor. Memories that made her head ache, like they didn't fit, like they didn't belong, just like they didn't belong in this room, watching these tapes.

Then the tape started playing, and Gwen remembered no more.

Changes

by Nilso

What if Doctors regenerated a season later?

The Evil of the Daleks – The First Doctor

*“Still don't know what I was waitin' for,
and my time was runnin' wild.
A million dead end streets
and every time I thought I'd got it made,
it seemed the taste was not so sweet.”*

Finding itself weaving effortlessly through the smallest hillocks of fetid dirt and colourless sand that the wasteland had to offer to the largest mountainous ridges of turgid rock, the cold Skarosian winds had been piercingly bitter all evening. Despite her wearing several layers of warm and insulated clothing, Victoria Waterfield still felt the biting nip of the cold as if she was wearing simply nothing at all. The cold was almost so to the point of distraction, but Victoria knew at that moment that she wouldn't be forgetting what she was feeling. She certainly felt angst, she knew that. She also knew that she was feeling an almost palpable sense of tension, which she supposed was normal in her situation. Saying that, however, she wasn't able to compare it to anything that she had felt in her previously prim and straight-laced life at all. All Victoria had ever known was opulent luxury afforded to her by her father and a whole ward of servants and maids. She often felt rather silently exasperated that despite her apparent wealth she never had anyone she could properly call a friend.

In the space of a fortnight, Victoria had been uprooted from her home, held as a prisoner in a large featureless metal dungeon and interrogated by terrifying monsters from another world. Victoria found herself wondering if her ordeal was truly over; if this was the case she might be able to return home to England with her father, allowing both to continue with their lives as they had before they had come to know the lecherous and greed-ridden crank that Theodore Maxtible had readily proven himself to be.

But here she was, standing on the precipice of a somewhat daunting cliff-face watching a stiff and rigid city of steel and glass sporadically explode with green explosions with an occasional outburst of venting purple gas. What had once seemed to be a cold and soulless architectural mish-mash of rectangles, squares and cylinders now beckoned as

an apparition of warmth Victoria felt that she could almost reach and bring just a bit closer. Despite the blaze being some five or six miles away, she reckoned that a firestorm that high and bright would have at least warmed the surrounding area. It was in a relatively close proximity to her position on the hillside but no warmth made it her way; Victoria chose to imagine it for herself, if only keeping her mind warm. If she stood still and listened intently for a few moments, she may have sworn that she could hear the Emperor Dalek's voice being carried on the wind, still commanding the battle despite the entire city being virtually consumed under a toxic wall of black smoke. Occasionally several small flashes of light could be seen emanating from several vantage points dotted around sections of the city which weren't smothered by billowing plumes. If they were anything of note, they were most likely the stray blasts of Dalek weaponry although she hoped that one of them would be a flashlight held by either her father or the stranger that had been so close to him. The smoke had mainly been contained to an area just inside the city limits, but Victoria could see that it was slowly encroaching into the sky, half hidden by narrowly winding valleys and ravines of strange dead trees.

Behind her stood a worried-looking, wiry Scottish Highlander and a large ornate faux-wooden box, both of who were also watching the city burn in the distance. Jamie had deliberately decided to stay by the Doctor's side inside the Dalek City out of a sense of loyalty, honour and duty. 'It was only right,' thought Jamie. After all, this old man had saved Jamie's life more times than Jamie could think of so it felt right to try and return the favour. It was only when Jamie had been faced with the prospect of Victoria wandering around the City alone in the middle of a Dalek Civil War by her father Edward that he begrudgingly separated from the Doctor and left to locate her and take her to the relative safety of the TARDIS. During his last glance back at both the Doctor and Edward, Jamie had noticed a certain type of frailty which he had never seen in him before. It may have been the lateness of the hour at hand for all he knew; he wasn't able to check since the TARDIS had long since rendered his watch inoperable, but he was sure that they had both been on the move for the last four days without any real rest.

Jamie stepped forward and stood next to Victoria. "They'll be back soon, I'm sure of it. I've known the Doctor for a while now and he's tougher than a big pile of shoe-leather." He had initially spoken to calm her doubts, but had then come to the subtle realisation that he was mainly speaking for himself. It didn't matter either way, as Victoria chose not to answer.

Jamie found it odd that they hadn't met any wildlife or alien fauna during their rushed trip back to the TARDIS with the exception of Kemel and Maxtible. Jamie wondered to himself if it was even right to classify Maxtible as a human being anymore; he certainly

hadn't acted like one, for one thing. He didn't speak like one, nor did he walk like one – instead of the thirsty old man he'd previously met this new Maxtible walked with purpose and minimal dramatic flair. Gone were the simple quirks that Jamie had subconsciously noticed before, now seemingly replaced by an almost entirely new figure. Jamie thought that he was seeing things that weren't there again; it hadn't been the first time after all.

This thought had been cleansed of all doubt when Maxtible had called out for Kemel the Turk to stand by his side, to which he had responded – before action could be taken to prevent it, Kemel lay dead and irreparably broken, cracked, snapped and bent at the bottom of the gorge, picked up and thrown by a man less than half his size and even less-so strong than him. Kemel had landed several well-placed hits to the seemingly-thin top of the old man's skull, but this seemed to incubate a frenzied state in him. Jamie had readied himself with his blade but just before the critical moment "Maxtible" had seemingly spoken to someone who was not even there and ran back to the City's inferno, ranting and raving all the while. Jamie almost felt a subtle pang of sympathy for the old man but deep down knew that he was an old man no longer. Maxtible had become a Dalek in a human body, and all of the things that had made him the disgusting old man he was had been washed away.

"It's too cold out here Victoria; we should go inside the TARDIS and wait there."

"But what if he's hurt, Jamie? We simply mustn't leave him out here alone."

"I'm sure he and your father will be ok. Anyway, it's getting dark now and we—"

Jamie stopped speaking in order to use all of his focus to watch the figure approaching them from the darkness about a hundred metres away. As the figure made its way to them, both Jamie and Victoria likewise made their way to it. The shape formed into perfect clarity the closer they got to it, and to Victoria's dismay saw that it was indeed a solitary figure. Jamie called out for the Doctor as he came nearer, and the Doctor wearily waved back, snapped cane in hand. Everything about him seemed somewhat softer to Jamie; his physique seemed feebler, his hair looked whiter than before and his posture was certainly one of an ill and tired old man.

"Why aren't you waiting for me to arrive inside the TARDIS, dear boy?" said the Doctor before mumbling to himself. "It's without a doubt the safest place on Skaro and unless I'm very much mistaken our way out of this mess!"

Victoria stopped doe-eyed a few steps away from the Doctor. "My father, is he...?"

The Doctor stood solemn. "I'm afraid so, my dear. But he didn't die in vain. Absolutely not, his actions saved my life. For what it's worth child, your father was a hero. I absolutely owe my life to him."

Jamie decided to speak up. "Are you sure you're ok, Doctor? You're looking a bit ragged."

"Don't worry about it, my boy. Come now, let's get back to the ship; we mustn't keep your quiet friend Kemel waiting in there! I can only wonder what he thinks of the inside of the ship!"

Victoria spoke up. "I'm afraid Mr Kemel shan't be joining us, Doctor. Maxtible killed him."

"Oh dear, what a shame. A true shame, indeed" The Doctor sighed. "We've got to get inside the ship, my child. It's intolerably cold here. I must get to the room immediately or I'll end up catching my death of cold out here."

As they made their way back to the TARDIS, the Doctor stumbled against the door. Jamie steadied his balance as both looked back to Victoria.

"We can't leave her alone, Doctor. She's got nothing left and no way home." Jamie murmured.

"My dear fellow we're not going to leave her here, she's coming with us."

Jamie escorted Victoria into the TARDIS as the Doctor stood for the briefest of moments watching the burning city. 'It's the end', he thought to himself. "The final end." With that, he pulled the doors to and a crack of thunder rang out, illuminating the entirety of the valley. Small drops of acid rain began to pelt the TARDIS. It didn't seem to mind as it was just happy that the Doctor was relatively safe. Sound, however? The TARDIS wasn't so sure. He'd sort himself out at his own speed.

Under the bright lights of the TARDIS console room, Victoria stood star struck. Only a few moments ago she thought that she'd be most cramped inside the antique cabinet but ended up finding herself greeted by a gentle and radiating heat. The console roundels generated a ready source of light as the Time Rotor gently turned in its casing. The ceiling seemed to reach into the sky as the interior lights began to turn themselves on, illuminating the rest of the room.

"There we are, my dear. Well, what do you think? Hmm?" spoke the Doctor, sitting in a wicker chair by the console.

"I don't know. I can't believe it, it's so big. Where are we?" Victoria responded.

"It's the TARDIS, young Waterfield. It's my home. At least, it has been for a considerable number of years now. I left my planet and my people behind long ago and day I intend to return to them. I rather think that time is for the moment out of my reach in my current state, so I'm afraid I shall have to wait until more water flows under certain bridges." The Doctor seemed weary to Victoria, which reminded her of her late-grandfather Jonathan. He had seemed like this only a few hours before his passing some ten years ago now.

"Doctor, are you ok?"

Jamie's ears pricked up. He had been fiddling with one of the circuits on the control console in order to take off and hadn't noticed that the Doctor seemed somewhat off upon entering.

"I shall be in a few minutes. Would you both get me a glass of water? I'm finding myself becoming somewhat faint all of a sudden."

"Of course, Doctor. The food bank machine's over this way, Victoria. If you want a drink, you can come with me to get one."

Victoria seemed relieved. "Oh, thank you, I'm positively parched."

Jamie and Victoria left the console room briefly and returned with three glasses of cool water. As far as Jamie could tell, it had been at least three days since they had last eaten or drank anything.

"Here you go, Doctor." Said Jamie, passing the glass to the open hand raised in front of the Doctor.

The hand didn't seem to want to grasp onto the glass at all. Jamie placed it in his grasp three or four times before the Doctor seemingly grabbed hold of it. As soon as Jamie left the glass in his hand, it slipped from the Doctor's fingers and shattered all over the floor covering the Doctor's shoes in water. Victoria spun around at the sound of the shattering to match the Doctor's eyes; their focus wasn't on the floor or his damp feet. Instead, his focus was at the far console wall, a thousand-yard stare etched onto his face. Jamie soon realised that the Doctor's outfit was no longer pristine and perfect as it had been at Gatwick Airport as his jacket seemed somewhat singed. He hadn't been able to tell before due to the darkness of the Skarosian sky, but it was as if the Doctor had taken the brunt of an energy weapon, or if he had been hit by some debris while exiting the city.

The thousand-yard stare broke as the Doctor looked up to Jamie and Victoria, a look of serene calmness and understanding on his face.

“I must get to the Zero Room as soon as I can, dear boy. Will you both help me there?” said The Doctor lightly. Jamie had been living in the TARDIS for just about a year now and he hadn’t heard of this room before.

“The Zero Room - where’s that, then, Doctor?”

Victoria looked down at the Doctor’s tightly clasped hand in hers and gasped. Following Victoria’s cue, Jamie too looked at the Doctor’s other hand and saw that it too was shimmering. The Doctor exhaled one last breath and began to lose his footing. Guiding him carefully to the ornate chair, both Jamie and Victoria rubbed their eyes and tried to make sense of what they saw before them; it was like the Doctor’s skin had begun to vibrate and shake with a ferocious intensity to a point where it blurred and shimmered like dew on early morning grass.

Jamie was the first to speak. “Doctor, what’s happening?” he hurriedly asked.

But the Doctor didn’t, or couldn’t, respond.

Instead, he changed.

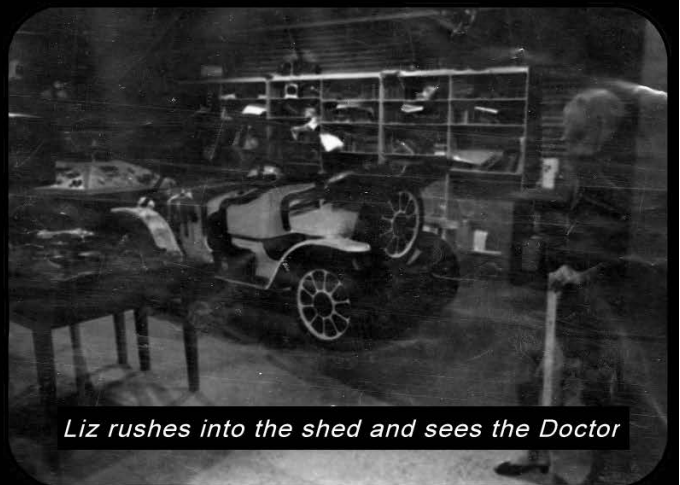
The Inferno – The Second Doctor

[STORY MISSING]

*"So I turned myself to face me,
but I've never caught a glimpse.
How the others must see the faker -
I'm much too fast to take that test."*



The control room remains quiet as the count



Liz rushes into the shed and sees the Doctor

Genesis of the Daleks – The Third Doctor

“Turn and face the strange,
don't want to be a richer man
Turn and face the strange,
there's gonna have to be a different man
Time may change me,
but I can't trace time.”

*High Councillor Romaine stared intently at the relay monitor on the wall of the Thal City Council Chamber, fully embracing what he was watching. The Kaled City was aflame, and after just shy of a thousand years of conflict, the war was all but over. A new era of peace was within his grasp, and it would be because of his efforts. ‘Romaine, the Peace Bringer’, the people would call him. ‘Of course’, he thought to himself, ‘none of this would have been possible without that disingenuous cripple Davros, a traitor true, through and through until the last possible moment. His end was a truly fitting one for such an obstacle under the boot of Thal dominance. Under **my** boot.’ Hopefully both would be dead, and history would be none the wiser to their assistance in the genocide of their own race.*

Turning to his entourage of subordinates in the Chamber, the High Councillor held the haughty arrogance of a strutting cockerel and the lofty charm of a conniving snake oil salesman. “A thousand years of war, and now it has ended!” he said, puffing out his chest. Cupping his hand to his ear, he heard the sounds of the Thal people cheering out in victory. “Listen, the people, they know already. Gentleman, there’s a great deal to be done. I must speak to the people, and there must be a victory parade immediately!”

As the High Councillor’s gaze turned to the red herring in the room, the gaze of everyone else, including Bettan, turned also. Sitting in rusted chains in one of the seats by the door was an intruder dressed in the guise of a Security Officer that had been apprehended in the missile silo. The intruder held a refined posture despite his surroundings, maintaining a manner of elegance at all times. He held an aristocratic nose, distinct facial contours and soft blue eyes. Atop his head was a well-maintained bouffant of silver-white hair which bounced ever so slightly as he moved from side to side.

“And as for him, he must be punished immediately!” decreed the High Chancellor. As he looked for approval, his eyes fell upon Bettan, leading him to an all together different decision. “No, let us now show to the new generations that whilst we were ruthless in

war, we are generous in victory. Vice-Councillor Chescu, issue a statement effective immediately that all prisoners be freed, charges against them dropped.”

With that final statement, High Councillor Romaine, Vice-Councillor Chescu and the remainder of his entourage left the Council Chamber, leaving the intruder unshackled. Bettan had thought about following the councillors, but chose to instead speak to the intruder, who was now rubbing his face with his hands.

“Did you have friends in the Kaled city?” Bettan asked.

The intruder lifted his head up. “Yes, I did, two people very dear to me. I’m afraid to say that I sent them into that holocaust, into the fire and flame. I’m certain that they’re both dead now.”

Bettan paused for a moment in reflection. “What will you do now?”

The intruder thought to himself for a brief moment. “Start again, hopefully. Try and find a way to complete what I set out to do and stop the development of the Daleks.”

Bettan didn’t know what a Dalek was. “Daleks?”

“Yes. Disgusting machine creatures developed by Davros. Monstrous things.”

“Davros? No, you must be wrong – it was he who told us how to destroy the Kaled dome. His only interest was in achieving peace.”

The intruder’s gaze turned steely. “Let me tell you something. The Kaled government was on the point of stopping Davros’ experiments, and rather than let that happen, Davros helped you destroy his entire race.”

Bettan found this to be incredulous. “You’ll never be able to convince anyone of that now that the war is finally over.”

“The war may be over for now, my dear, but while life exists on either side of the battlefield, no matter the size, no war is ever truly over.”

Bettan looked at her watch. “I must go, now. Under the amnesty granted you are free to leave whenever you wish to. Goodbye.”

Before Bettan left the Chamber, she turned once more to see the intruder, motionless and staring at the monitor and the flames it held in its picture. It would not be until half an hour later that their paths would meet again when the Thal City was subjected to a retaliatory strike that was many magnitudes heavier than the one they themselves had inflicted. On their way out of the city, both the Doctor and Bettan saw High Chancellor

Romaine on a large monitor begging for the slaughter to cease before being cut off by a voice accentuated by a low rumbling staccato drone. The blast emitted by the Dalek obscured the screen, cutting the video link off. On the other side of the Thal City, the Council Chamber was rocked by a large explosion, causing it to collapse in upon itself.

By this point, the intruder had started calling himself the Doctor. To tell the truth, Bettan didn't care what he called himself; she was just pleased to have escaped the slaughter. After discussing what to do next, the Doctor declared that Bettan should attempt to group any survivors into a fighting force to attack the Kaled Bunker. And with that, the Doctor disappeared into the fog and smoke, talking to himself about heading back to the Bunker to try and find his friends.

To those who were unfamiliar with its winding pathways and ever-increasing dead ends, the entrance of the Kaled Bunker's Relief Shaft held host to a whole sub-structure of several sprawling off-shoots, with several corridors rigged with explosive charges, acid sprays and nail bombs placed in strategic positions that would grievously wound and cripple instead of killing the intended target outright.

While the actual entrance was located in a since overrun Kaled Security Outpost, the jungle in which the Outpost resided in sat on the easternmost precipice of Drammankin Lake (which was better known to both the Kaleds and the Thals as 'The Lake of Mutations'). Despite the Bunker's prevalence in both the Kaled and Thal forces as a key point for military manoeuvres, both parties avoided attacking or defending the position unless it was incredibly important for a distinct and sound reason; due to its close proximity to both Drammankin Lake and the surrounding forest, several types of creatures would wander into the Shaft from the brush in an attempt to find food or shelter.

As a result, the long-reaching shaft had several areas and zones throughout its structure which was either completely caked from wall-to-wall with Varga nests or were home to packs of rabid Slythers. Bettan had heard rumours from gossiping sentries in the Thal City that a Terrorkon had also found its way into the tunnels, making it not only completely impossible for the Thals to attack from that angle, but also impossible for the Kaleds to remove it from its entrenched nesting place.

Bettan had also heard rumours and snippets of half-heard conversations of how the Kaleds were ambivalent about how to keep their most important strategic strength/weakness properly defended; some Kaled Officers had apparently argued that such an important obstacle would have to be completely cleaned head to toe in the

case of a complete defeat to allow for a swift exit, while some Officers said that the area should be allowed to continue thriving and allow for a natural obstacle that any intruder would have to deal with on top of the pitfalls and booby traps.

From the looks of the outfits on the identifiable bodies that littered the grounds of the Kaled Outpost in which the Shaft's entrance resided, the soldiers who had been stationed there had only died in the last day or so, as the blood had only just begun to congeal and stain the sandy soil. Most of the bodies had been savaged by a host of large animals, while the odd body showed all the signs of Varga infection. The oldest body of the lot appeared to be in his late twenties, while the youngest looked not a day older than fifteen. Madoc guessed that they must have been part of the Youth Reserve Force that the Kaleds had created some centuries ago. They may have been her enemies, but not even Bettan thought that they deserved to die this way. If they had been a few years older, Bettan may not have felt as bad about their passing, but these corpses weren't twenty-something's, nor were they thirty-something's; they were teenagers. Sending the young to die for the sake of the old was not the way that Bettan would fight a war at all. This wasn't to say that she was in a position to say that she was morally superior to the Kaleds in this regard, as she had been a member of the Thal equivalent of the YRF herself. She was as much of a hypocrite as High Councillor Romaine was.

However, she was relieved to see that the Shaft was no longer properly manned as a great deal of time had been spent on forging a path through the menagerie of arid wasteland, thick grass, passing Dalek / Kaled Patrols and the odd indescribable mutant instead of actually planning what to do when they arrived there.

The casualties on the journey to the Shaft's entrance had been smaller than Bettan had expected them to be, although this reassurance didn't exactly calm her nerves that much as she could still cast her mind back to see the gruesome sight of Prospal and Landrian being dragged under the lake by something... big. She didn't exactly see what it looked like, no one did; more to her credit, she thought. No one had seen much of it, yet each individual claimed to have seen something different – Holman said it had a spiked tentacle covered in sharp thorns, Bruchner said that its skin looked pock-marked and covered in lesions, while Doran, Madoc and Stathe said it raised itself at least two stories out of the lake on seven thin and hairy legs. Only one detail stayed the same over each testimony. Its head looked infantile, soft and misshapen. Bettan could have been convinced that she'd heard it screaming as Landrian disappeared from her side, but she wasn't sure as she'd already started running by then.

By this point it didn't matter, as death sat before her, in front of her and above her. Whichever way she chose to move next didn't alter that outcome. Leaving a small selection of her Guerrillas at the mouth of the Shaft in order to maintain radio contact in case of an ambush, Bettan entered the system of tunnels in order to meet up with the man that had saved her life in the Dalek and Kaled attack on the Thal City. Once Bettan had chosen who she would take into the Bunker with her and left, the remaining guerrillas began to burn the bodies infected with Varga thorns.

The route through the winding corridors had been easier to navigate than anyone had expected it to be. Halfway into the search for the right path, a squadron of Daleks and Kaled foot soldiers fresh from the slaughter of the wasteland had careered down the correct path, leading Bettan and her guerrillas to a giant metal bulkhead. Once the doors had been opened, it was here that Bettan decided to set up a temporary base of operations in order to destroy the remaining Kaleds and Daleks deep inside the bunker. On the way through the corridors, Vano and Mensen had discovered a small storage cupboard full of electrical equipment such as a visual monitor and a power bank which allowed Stathe to tap into the security cameras inside the Bunker.

It was at this point that one of the Mutos that had been tagging along with the guerrillas announced to everyone present that he was going to go inside the bunker alone to try and rescue the Doctor and his friends.

"That's up to you. But you must understand that if you're not back, I must go on. You'll die in there with them" said Bettan to the Muto.

Sevran nodded. She wanted to tell him that she'd rather have him here with her to help repel any possible Daleks attacks, but she knew that the Doctor deserved a show of gratitude for helping her escape the City. "I'll see what time I can give you."

The Muto recognised this offer and left. Half way down the short corridor, Bettan called out for him to come back.

"Are you sure you want to do this on your own? I can spare a few people to go with you, if you want."

"I'll be able to make it on my own. You'll need as many people as you can muster here."

Sevran disappeared around the corner, leaving Bettan to wonder how much time she could really afford him.

Despite Sevrán, Sarah and Harry only just arriving at the temporary base of operations situated at the bulkhead, all three were aware that they had walked into the middle of an uproar. Several guerrillas directed by Bettan were hurriedly attaching plastic explosives to the struts supporting the ceiling while two men fiddled with a small device which was hooked up a larger box of wires and cables inside the monitor.

Sarah spoke up first. "Sevrán, who's in charge here?" Sevrán pointed towards Bettan, and Sarah walked over to her. "What's the rush?"

Bettan inserted the detonator into the plastic explosives and handed it to Madoc, who in turn fastened it to the wall. "As soon as we're finished here, we're going to collapse several miles worth of passageways on the Kaled side of the tunnel. They won't know what hit them, and, if we're lucky enough, they won't ever know anything else again."

Sarah, Harry and Sevrán shot each other several alarmed glances. "When are you going to do this?" said Sarah.

"We still have two more beams to cover with detonators, so we should be done in the next five minutes."

Harry stepped forward. "But the Doctor's still inside the bunker! You can't leave him trapped in there, and I'm not going to sit around like a couple of spare lemons and let you bury him under hundreds of tons of dirt, either!"

Bettan frowned. "You don't seem to understand the situation at hand here. In about ten minutes both the outside tunnel and the inside tunnel are going to be swarming with as many Daleks as they can muster, so we must finish placing these detonators as soon as possible!"

Thoroughly exasperated with Bettan, Sarah began to walk defiantly back the way they had just come from. Harry rushed around in front of her and blocked the pathway, stepping left and right to deny any passing either side of him. Sarah turned her head to Bettan, who in turn turned her head to Madoc.

Before Bettan could ask him to get a report from the survey scout, the subtle tension in the air was cut by the sound of gunfire. Bruchner, who had already positioned himself slightly further into the tunnel bolted around the corner.

"Is the area primed for detonation?" asked Bruchner in between attempts of trying to regain his breath.

“No, there’s five more minutes of set up yet. Have the Daleks entered the corridor system?” asked Sevrn.

“At the moment it’s only a small group of about six Kaled foot soldiers.”

Several guerrillas hurriedly made their way past the small crowd to the forward positions. Despite being hastily cobbled together with spare metal sheeting and upturned carrier carts, these fortifications were able to withstand a fair amount of punishment from conventional weaponry. Madoc was already in position alongside Vano, Tiron and Mensen as Bruchner placed Rivac, Nola and Doran alongside them. Bettan crouched behind one of the cobbled-together fortifications and called out to everyone present in a hushed whisper. “Initially attack the centre ranks first with your rifles – once they begin to spread out to either side use your grenades. Understand?”

Sarah, Harry and Sevrn peered from the safety of the corner to observe the action as a small squad of Kaled soldiers broke cover. A volley of shots rang out from both sides, sending one Kaled backwards over an empty oil barrel and another into the dirt. Several more shots were fired from the Kaled soldiers, this time causing Vano and Mensen to collapse over the hastily prepared barricades. Picking up Vano’s rifle, Harry dove from his cover around the corner straight into the fight. Sarah grabbed at thin air trying to bring him back, but Sevrn extended a large misshapen arm to pull her to safety.

From across the other side of the tunnel, Harry seemed to recognise one of the Kaled attackers as Security Sub-Commander Tane, the man who had forced him into the scanning machine upon his arrival at the bunker. Harry chambered a round and took aim at Tane. Seeing Harry take aim, Tane threw himself to the floor to avoid the shot, which ricocheted loudly off the wall.

Suddenly, three Daleks careered from around the Kaled tunnel corner and began firing on the barricades, blasting several holes clean through the sheet metal. With a blinding flash of light and radiation, Tiron and Nola writhed in agony and collapsed against the walls. Bettan and Bruchner swiftly noticed that their initial plan of driving the Kaleds towards the edges of the tunnel had worked.

“Now!” cried Bettan as she threw a grenade overhead. The grenade landed directly at the base of one of the Daleks, causing an explosion which partially brought down the ceiling right on top of it. Following the destruction of the Dalek, the remaining Kaled soldiers jumped up from their cover and began to encroach on the guerrilla’s perimeter.

“Come on, move it! Dalek, exterminate them!” called out Tane as he brandished his pistol in the air. Suddenly, and without warning, Tane and the Kaled soldiers were

blasted away from no one other than the Dalek itself, collapsing on top of one another in a jumbled heap.

Holman came from around the corner and called out to Bettan. "We're finished back here!"

"Right, everybody move back!" commanded Bettan. Allowing for those at the back to escape first, Harry and Madoc gave covering fire against the Dalek. Once everyone had moved back, both men attempted to follow suit. As the Dalek broke through the perimeter line it fired a blast to which Madoc took the full brunt of, killing him instantly. Bettan threw the final grenade, and the Dalek exploded in a bright flash of purple and yellow flames.

Retreating into the small hallway on the other side of the bulkhead, Bettan turned to face Bruchner, who held the detonator remote in his hand. "Now!"

Sarah rushed forward and grabbed hold of Bruchner's arm. "No, I won't let you! The Doctor's still inside the bunker! You can't do this!" Bettan quickly restrained Sarah and commanded Bruchner to activate the charge.

Harry poked his head out of the bulkhead and saw a familiar shape running towards them. "It's the Doctor, wait! He's right outside!" he declared. The guerrillas that had begun to push the bulkhead doors shut began to separate them again.

"You simply must hurry with this door, there are several more Daleks following me and they seem to be turning on the Kaleds soldiers and scientists!" the Doctor called out. Before anyone could say or do anything to stop it, the burnt and barely conscious figure of Tane emanated in a frayed black military uniform from around the corridor and fired several shots at the Doctor. Gasping sharply, the Doctor maintained his footing for the most part against the bulkhead door while falling through the now open crack. Again, Harry took aim and knew that this time, he wouldn't miss. As Tane collapsed to the floor, the silhouettes of tens of Daleks covered the far wall.

Bettan ordered the bulkhead doors to be resealed. Once done, Bruchner activated the detonator, causing a colossal explosion which caused the walls surrounding the bulkhead doors to crack.

Harry pressed down heavily on the wound on small of the Doctor's back while stemming the flow of blood with his jacket.

"How bad is it?" Sarah asked frantically.

"I think it passed through in one complete piece, but if we don't get him some medical help as soon as possible, then I'm afraid he might be done for." Harry diagnosed.

"We have to get him to the TARDIS as soon as possible!"

"I daren't move him in his current condition. The shock might kill him."

As Sarah and Harry quickly pondered over what to do, a loud wheezing sound began to emanate from all around them. In a matter of seconds, their surroundings changed from a dark tunnel to the brightly lit control room of the TARDIS.

A figure in black robes with the apparent dress-sense of an early 19th century clown appeared from behind the Time Rotor. "My name is Valyes. I am a Time Lord."

"Did you bring the TARDIS here?" said Sarah.

"I thought that it may be a mistake to allow you to travel through the wastelands with an injured man, so I brought the TARDIS to you instead." Valyes moved from the Console to the Doctor's side, crouching down beside him. "I can see that he's very gravely injured."

Valyes looked over at the console and motioned a half-wave. The TARDIS Console sprung to life and departed from Skaro. "When I entered the Doctor's TARDIS, I noticed that the console was behaving erratically. Upon closer inspection, it appears that a direct radio signal is being beamed to you from the planet Earth, so I have plotted a direct course change for you." Valyes stood up and pointed his hands at the Doctor. "Both of you must stand back." Sarah and Harry jumped away from the Doctor as a beam of electrical energy left Valyes' fingertips.

"Goodbye. Look after him." said Valyes as he dissipated into nothingness. Harry stood up and made his way over to where Valyes had been standing.

"Wait a moment, old chap! What about the Doctor?" said Harry. Sarah tugged on his trouser leg and gasped.

"Harry, look at the Doctor!"

The Doctor's features began to blur and change under a hue of blue light. "While there's death, there's..."

Following a flash of light, a new man sat up with radiant curls sat up. "While there's life, there's life."

Earthshock – The Fourth Doctor

*"I watch the ripples change their size,
but never leave the stream
of warm impermanence, and
so the days float through my eyes."*

"Scott to TARDIS, Scott to TARDIS, come in please." The small handheld radio perched on the TARDIS console shone as Scott's voice modulated.

Nyssa grabbed hold of it and pressed down on the trigger and spoke hurriedly. "This is the TARDIS, we have Cybermen on board." From behind her, a hulking biosynthetic monstrosity grabbed hold of the radio.

Scott's message left a pit of dread in the Doctor's stomach. "We've managed to escape the freighter, but Adric's still on board." Feeling around his left pocket, he suddenly realised that Adric had given him his golden-edged star of Mathematical Excellence.

The Cyber Leader effortlessly crushed the radio in his hand and threw it at the floor.

"You've failed, Leader. In trying to destroy the Earth, you've aided in its very creation. Your Gambit has ended before it even started!" said the Doctor gravely.

"The plan is not yet abandoned, Doctor – I am still in control of your TARDIS, and on my command, you will pilot this vessel back to Cyber Control on Telos. Once we arrive, we will be in control of a working Time Vessel which we will then duplicate and replace our Cyber Fleets. With a fleet of Time Vessels, we will change future defeats into absolute victories!" proclaimed the Cyber Leader.

"You know very well that I can't allow you to do that. I refuse to help you achieve total dominance over other life forms. I would rather destroy this TARDIS before helping you."

The Cyber Leader grabbed hold of Nyssa's hair and moved her in front of the Doctor, aiming his gun at her head. **"This attitude has been accounted for. If you do not operate the controls within five seconds, I shall kill the female."**

The Doctor seethed in anger. "No!"

"Then a logical impasse presents itself, Doctor. I shall know kill her."

Tegan jumped onto the Cyber Leader's gun arm. With an astounding level of strength, the Cyber Leader threw her off, her head connecting hard with the Console Room wall, cracking one of the roundels. Acting quickly, the Doctor followed suit and stabbed the golden star right through the Cyber Leader's chest plate. In a last ditch attempt to

destroy the TARDIS, the Cyber Leader wheezed laboriously, turned and opened fire at the Time Rotor with another blast fracturing the scanner in two.

The Doctor jumped the Cyber Leader and was thrown at the console. Looking for another weapon to use, Nyssa grabbed hold of the hat stand that stood by the console room doors and hit the Cyber Leader across the back repeatedly. Using all of his body weight, the Doctor wrestled the gun out of his hands; once in his own, the Doctor fired, causing the Cyber Leader to spark and burn. The Cyber Leader feverishly gripped the Doctor's sleeves as if his emotional inhibitor had short circuited. As it slid to its knees, the Doctor's left sleeve was torn completely off, leaving a severe grip imprinted into his arm. Firing again caused the interior of the Cyber Leader's helmet to dislodge and leak circulatory fluids while the final shot destroyed his helmet completely.

Nyssa had collapsed to her knees. As he went to help her to her feet, the Doctor called out in pain. "Doctor, are you ok?" she inquired.

The Doctor spoke through clenched teeth. "I'll be fine. Is Tegan ok?"

Nyssa checked Tegan's head only to find that her head was only lightly bruised. "She's alright, but she'll have a serious concussion when she wakes up." Nyssa held onto the Doctor's now sleeveless arm. "Let me take a look at your arm, Doctor."

The Doctor pulled his arm away from her. "We'll sort it out later. Right now, our main objective is to get Adric off the freighter and pick up Scott and the others."

"Apart from your left hand I think that the Cyberman has crushed all of the bones in your left arm. You have to let me check it for you!" begged Nyssa.

"No!" demanded the Doctor. The seriousness in his voice took him by surprise. "It'll have to wait for a while."

The Doctor hit both of his hands against the Console. "The Console is damaged! The TARDIS isn't following any of its command inputs!"

"We must get Adric off the freighter, there's so little time!" said Nyssa. As she moved herself to another panel of the Console, she realised that two more Cybermen had just entered the Console Room. "Look out!"

"Destroy them!" commanded the Cyber Lieutenant. Salvos of shots were fired from both sides of the console. Nyssa dove to the floor and fired a shot at the Cyberman nearest the door causing him to double over and partially combust. Another series of

shots narrowly missed Nyssa as she fired again, causing the Cyber Lieutenant to fall through the door leading to the corridor.

Nyssa stood up and shouldered the rifle. "Are you ok, Doctor?"

The Doctor stood at the console in a state of catatonia. He opened his mouth in order to speak, but he couldn't find any words to say. The Doctor had felt this before on Skaro – both of his hearts had stopped working. He stumbled, trying to regain his footing. Nyssa ran to his side in order to brace his fall to his knees.

Tegan murmured and rubbed the front of her head, then sat up. "Ah, cripes, that hurts. Doctor, are you alright?"

"Tegan, you've got to help me! I think the Doctor's been shot!" pleaded Nyssa.

Taking a moment to get to her feet, Tegan's gaze was captivated by the cracked scanner. "Is Adric still on board the freighter?"

"Yes, he is, and I think we've almost run out of time to rescue him."

"Fast... fast ret... urn switch..." moaned the Doctor, pointing at a set of switches on the console.

"I'm sorry, Adric. I'm sorry, I don't think I can..." said the Doctor as he forced himself to his feet. The Doctor managed to make his way to the console and press a series of buttons. Slowly, but surely, the Time Rotor began to spin and rise. Tegan stayed transfixed on the scanner as Nyssa rushed over to help the Doctor, and could see that they were making their way towards the freighter. However, the TARDIS did not stop once it met the freighter; instead, it flew past it and headed further into space.

"Doctor, no! You can't just leave Adric there!" fumed Tegan.

The Doctor didn't respond because he couldn't hear her; all of his sensory functions had malfunctioned. He couldn't tell that he'd spun around raggedly in circles before landing on the console room floor, nor could he tell exactly what he was thinking. He couldn't tell from Nyssa and Tegan's tears that the freighter had collided with the Earth. All he could see was an instantaneous flash of light.

To Win Stone

by Neo

What if the Ninth Doctor was Ray Winstone instead of Christopher Eccleston?

Author's Note: Thanks to Nilso for both the alternate Doctor character concepts and the fantastic imagework - t. Nilso forever!

Mickey Smith was watching TV in his flat when his girlfriend blew up.

Well, he didn't know if she'd blown up, exactly, but the Henrik's she worked at had. He cried out in horror, and the rest of his gang - Mook Jayasundera, Patrice Okereke, and Sally Salter - rushed over to console him.

"Maybe she'd already left?" offered Sally.

"Nah, not my Rose, she takes this job seriously, she wouldn't even leave early for me. Oh god..."

He was utterly inconsolable until Patrick answered the phone, insisted it was Jackie Tyler, and Mook and Sally dragged him over to answer it.

"She's alright Mickey! She's back home. What kind of boyfriend are you, not even here to see her?"

He didn't even respond to that, just rushed out the door, quick as he could. Into his old yellow Volkswagen Beetle he went, pattering over as fast to the Powell estate as it could putter. When he arrived, he enveloped Rose in a massive hug.

"I thought I'd lost you, baby, don't ever do that to me again!"

They exchanged a few words together but Rose was more withdrawn than usual, probably out of shock. Jackie wheedled Mickey into going out to go and get crisps for the crowd that had amassed in the Tyler apartment, giving him all of five pounds to do so.

When he returned, he saw all Friday night programmes had been suspended, the disaster at Henrik's more pressing news. Rose had shushed everyone when one of the more bizarre aspects of the atrocity came out, that fake memos had seen everyone at Henrik's leave the building for one reason or another, everyone apart from one Bernard

Wilson. Who exactly Wilson was seemed to be a matter of some debate, as the BBC reported him as the chief electrician, whereas ITV reported him as the senior caretaker.

“She’s here now!” Mickey could hear Jackie cry out to someone on the phone. “She looks a wreck! Skin like an old bible, I swear, if you walked in here now you’d think I was her daughter.”

That was enough for Mickey. Checking if anyone minded first, he turned the TV to the football. Rose didn’t complain.

“Take that,” she eventually said, slapping him with the dummy arm she’d carried with her from Henrik’s. “Take that. Take it and get rid of it.

“Well, good thinking yeah, cause what you need is a good drink inside you,” said Mickey, trying his luck. “My treat.”

“I’ve got a cup of tea.”

“No, you need something stronger, let’s go down the pub, you and me, right now.”

“You want to see the match,” she smiled, “don’t you?”

“No way!” he said, horrified at the thought of her reading his mind, seeing how it gorged on the thought of catching the highlights at the Olympus bar along with his mates, a pint, and some of this big fat salty chips. Rose loved those. “It’s finished, it’s over, we missed it, this is all about you, babe. Although...I could still catch the highlights.”

“I knew it,” she said, grinning in return. “You daft sod. Go on then, go, don’t worry about me, I’m knackered, I’m gonna go to bed. Just make sure you get rid of that thing.”

He took hold of the plastic arm, leaned in, kissed her.

“Do you want me to stay the night?” he asked quietly, but she declined with a smile, so he nodded, stood up, and crossed the room.

He paused in the doorway to mock the dummy arm strangling him, then gave a goodbye wave with it, and out the door he went.

“See ya!”.

Later that night, staggering back from the Olympus bar, some of the graffiti around town caught Mickey’s eye and, for some reason, he thought of Rose.

"I'm gonna visit her in the morning," he told Mook.

Mook rolled his eyes, and Patrice laughed.

"Like hell you are, nothing'll get you out of bed that early," he said.

"Just you watch," slurred Mickey. "I'm gonna be a right proper boyfriend and surprise her. Change things up a bit."

The others responded with disbelief but, sure enough, Mickey arose early the next day and made his way over to the Powell Estate.

Rose was not long up when he arrived.

"Mickey, what're you doing here so early?" she asked.

"Thought I'd surprise my girl."

She rolled her eyes and laughed, and they had a cup of tea together before increasingly-loud scratching noises behind the catflap of the door caught their attention. They walked over the door, Rose bending down to check the catflap, when they heard a grunt, an actual man's grunt, from the other side.

Rose opened the door and a gruff-looking, burly man stood there to greet him. Stubble covered a face that seemed permanently fixed into a frown.

"What are you doing here?" he asked flatly

"I live here!" said Rose.

"Why?" he asked, although the tone of his voice made it sound like he'd ended that sentence with a full stop instead of a question mark, like he was stating his disapproval instead of actually asking for information.

"Because I do."

The man held up some sort of metal rod, and contorted his face into an even more pronounced frown at it. Then he tapped Rose on the forehead, shook his own, and made to leave.

"Oh no you don't," said rose, dragging him across the doorway. "Inside. Right now."

"Yeah!" said Mickey. "Inside!"

Mickey slammed the door shut as Rose dragged the man inside for whatever reason. Jackie appeared, like the presence of any new man in the house automatically summoned her.

"Who are you then?" she asked demurely.

"Not interested," the man said bluntly.

"He's from the council," Rose said quickly. "Leave us alone, you get dressed, I'll deal with it."

Jackie huffed, and slammed her bedroom door behind her.

Mickey looked between the man and Rose, confused. Annoyed. Threatened.

"Listen, seriously, we need to go to the police, both of us," she said to him. "And if you won't, I'm going on my own, and I'm telling them all about you."

"Would you mind explaining what exactly is going on?" Mickey asked whichever one of them would listen.

"It doesn't matter," said the man, barely looking at him.

"There were these...dummy people," said Rose. "At the shop. Then this guy-"

"What's his name anyway?" asked Mickey.

"The Doctor," the man said.

"Yeah, doctor who is it?" asked Rose. "What's your name?"

The three of them were interrupted by a scratching, scrabbling noise from behind the sofa. It was loud enough they could hear it over Jackie's hairdryer.

The Doctor lifted the sofa, and the plastic dummy arm that Mickey had tossed last night, just as Rose told him to, flew at him, wrapping its plastic fingers around his throat.

Rose and Mickey stood there for a moment, gawping. Then, they rushed over to him, trying to pull it off him. Mickey pulled to the left. Rose pulled to the right. The doctor seemed to pulling in an entirely different direction to both of them. They all toppled over, landing on Jackie's bamboo-and-glass coffee table, which shattered into sticks and shards accordingly.

The doctor rolled over and Mickey straddled his chest, tugging at the arm. Rose threaded her arms through Mickey's legs, adding her hands to the struggle, clasping at the arm wrapped around the Doctor's throat to try and get it off.

The doctor shuffled in his pockets, pulled out that metal rod of his. It made a sort of whirring sound, and the arm stopped moving, stiffening like it indeed was a lifeless plastic arm.

Mickey heard the sound of footsteps, and realised Jackie had walked in on her daughter's boyfriend straddling a stranger's chest, while her daughter bent through his legs to clutch her hands around the stranger's neck as if she was choking him, while all three of them panted, sweaty and dishevelled.

"What the fuck?"

After escaping that situation, barging past a very loud Jackie, Rose and Mickey followed the Doctor down the walkway past the Powell Estate.

"Wait!" Mickey yelled after the Doctor.

"Hold on a minute," Rose yelled. "You can't just go swanning off."

"Yes I can, Rose Tyler and Mickey Smith," he said as they caught up to him.

"You know our names, but who are you then?" asked Mickey.

"The Doctor."

"Yeah, but doctor what?"

"Just, the Doctor."

"The Doctor?"

"Yeah."

"Is that supposed to sound impressive?" asked Rose. When he didn't respond, she asked a different question. "Are you the police?"

"No. Just passing through."

"But what has Rose done wrong then?" asked Mickey. "Why did this plastic thing come after her?"

“Just in the way. World doesn’t revolve around you lot.”

“It tried to kill me,” said Rose, another detail about last night Mickey was learning for the first time.

“Was after me, not you.”

“So what you’re saying is, the entire world revolves around you?”

“It shouldn’t come after you again,” he said, ignoring Rose’s question. “Now, forget me, the two of you. Go home.”

He walked off, carrying the dummy arm. Rose and Mickey gave up and started to walk away, when they heard a strange noise and a rush of air. They turned back, but didn’t notice anything different.

Back at Mickey’s flat, Mook, Patrice, and Sally greeted Rose with much more fanfare than Mickey, whooping and hugging her and asking her about last night. Mickey left them to it as he made coffee for them all. They shared the remnants of a curry together, and Mickey engaged in some self-reflection while Rose seemed to relax a bit and enjoy the company of the lads.

Mickey and Rose had been connected long since they’d started going out with each other. Jackie had been friends with his mum since the 1980s. The family lore was that, at three years old, Mickey had visited baby Rose in the hospital the day she was born. Mickey knew they joked about him imprinting himself onto Rose, but anyone that really knew her would know that nobody was capable of that. Rose did as she pleased, and Mickey loved her for that. He counted himself beyond lucky to have her in his life, let alone be dating her.

After his mum had killed herself, Mickey had stayed with his dad for a time, but his dad hated any part of parenthood, and got out of it as quick as he could, literally sailing away from the country for good.

It was Gran that had given him a proper life. Blind as a bat, but a proper firebrand, she’d taken Mickey away from his home, away from the Powell Estate, but let him keep going to his old school even as he lived in the redbrick terrace on Wateron street instead. She even took him back to the estate on weekends so he could see the Tylers and all his other friends often as he liked, while keeping the door of her house open to anyone to come visit as they liked as well. He did his best to maintain that same policy now he’d

managed to get a flat of his own. He'd lost Gran now as well, but he had Rose, and his mates, and life was good.

"Mickey," asked Rose, "can I use your computer?"

"Yeah, any excuse to get in the bedroom," replied Mickey, before thinking for a moment and adding another thought. "Don't check my e-mails!"

Twenty minutes later, Rose rejoined him.

"Mickey, I need a lift."

"I'm here!" he said, grabbing the keys, and waving goodbye to the others as he walked out the door. "Don't miss me too much!"

"We're meeting for a sound check at six o'clock," called out Patrice.

"I'll be there."

"See you later!" Rose sang out to the others.

"Hey Rosie," called out Sally, "we were thinking of names for the band, something like Bad Karma, or maybe Bad Future, or Bad Timing, what do you think?"

Rose had already stepped out too far to hear their suggestions, and Mickey joined her before he could hear them as well.

In the car, as Rose explained they were going to meet someone who knew more about the Doctor, Mickey bristled at how suspicious it all sounded.

"I'm gonna kill him!" he snarled, gripping the wheel.

"Yes, he's a complete stranger off the internet," laughed Rose, "he wears black leather gloves and everything. Plus, a balaclava. I'm going to his house, to his dungeon, and you're taking me there, so it's your fault."

"I'm coming in with you!"

"You are not. Because I'm not a baby. You can just sit outside and if he gets a bit creepy, I can whistle."

"I'm coming in with you! I want to know about the Doctor as well. I saw him too."

“Well, what will you do if he does get a bit creepy? Will you handle it sensibly, or will you, you-”

“I’ll knock his block off!”

“You’ll knock his block off? Said Rose, and they both laughed. “Where are you from, 1950?”

“Pip, pip, old chap,” said Mickey as poshly as he could, and they both laughed and relaxed. Mickey insisted that she make up with her mother and at least tell them where they’d gone. Rose relented, even going so far as to give Jackie Clive’s home phone number. Mickey pretended not to hear that Jackie asked for it because she didn’t believe Mickey would be able to protect Rose from some internet murderer type.

When they arrived at the house of this Clive that Rose had located, Mickey parked the car near a black wheelie bin left by the street. They walked to Clive’s house together, and Rose knocked. A young boy answered.

“Hello, I’ve come to see Clive. We’ve been e-mailing.”

“Dad!” cried out the boy, not looking at Rose or Mickey. “It’s one of your nutters.”

“Oh, sorry, hello,” said a portly, goofy looking middle-aged guy waddling over to the door. “I’m Clive, obviously. You must be Rose, and...?”

“Mickey. Her boyfriend.”

“Ah, good idea,” said Clive, beaming.

“Who is it?” called out a woman’s voice.

“Oh, it’s something to do with the Doctor,” Clive called back. “They’ve been reading the website. Please, come through, I’m in the shed.”

The shed was littered with filing cabinets, bookshelves, old calendars, some kind of timeline pasted together on a wall, and all sorts of other conspiracy-type junk. Clive danced around, making them all tea, while Rose and Mickey exchanged a look.

“A lot of this stuff’s quite sensitive,” said Clive. “ I couldn’t just send it to you. People might intercept it, if you know what I mean. If you dig deep enough and keep a lively mind, this Doctor keeps cropping up all over the place. Political diaries, conspiracy theories, even ghost stories. No first name, no last name, just the Doctor. Always the Doctor. And the title seems to have been passed down; it appears to be inherited.”

Mickey noticed his voice had wavered a bit towards the end. Suspicious.

"Is that what you really think?" he asked him.

"Well," said Clive, meeting his eyes, "I'll get to that. First, look at this. That's your Doctor there, isn't it?"

"Yeah," said Rose and Mickey together.

Clive had pulled a photo from a corkboard and placed it in front of them. It was a polaroid of the Doctor frowning away at whoever had taken the picture. There was someone next to him, but their face was covered up with something like a cigarette burn and blotted ink.

"Took a long time tracking that one down, I tell you. Here, look at these too."

Clive showed them more and more impossible photos of the Doctor, in different scenes throughout history.

"The Doctor is a legend woven throughout history," Clive said animatedly. "When disaster comes, he's there. He brings the storm in his wake, and he has one constant companion."

"Who?" asked Mickey.

"Who's that?" asked Rose.

"Death. If the Doctor's back, if you've seen him, then one thing's for certain. We're all in danger. If he's singled you two out, if the Doctor's making house calls, then god help you."

"But who is?" asked Rose. "Who do you think he is?"

"And why'd you lie about who you think he is earlier?" pushed Mickey.

"Well, like I said, one theory says that it's a title, passed down father to son. But I think he's the same man. I think he's immortal. I think he's an alien from another world. No," he said as they stood up to leave, "but hold on. Before we stop, you should see the whole thing. He's not the final Doctor in the sequence, have a look at these."

Clive walked over to the corkboard he'd taken a polaroid from, pinned in back on, and gestured to the other polaroids attached to it, and to two larger framed photos next to it.

A severe-looking blond-ish man taller than their grizzled Doctor. A burlier, shorter man with a great big beard. A middle-aged man with grey hair and twinkling eyes. A

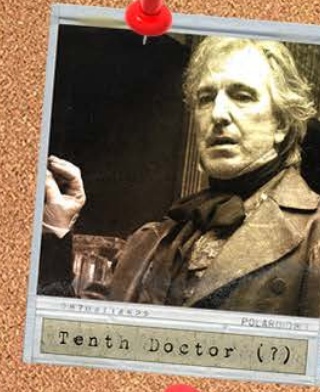
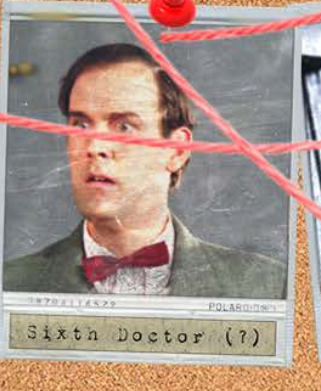
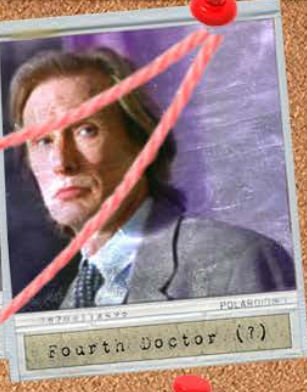
handsome man entering the back half of middle age as gracefully as possible, with a purple suit (or was it grey, and it was just the wall that was purple?), hair nearly reaching his shoulders, and a horizontal slab of a mouth with the slightest twitch at the corners indicating either wry amusement or wry disapproval.

More photos. A striking blond man with different colour eyes. A shocked, posh looking man with dark brown hair and a perennially-etched look of surprise on his face. A woman in a suit with sharp, intelligent eyes.

Clive waved them over to one of the framed photos. A sharp, dangerous-looking man in what looked some old type of soldier's uniform. The photo was old, and showed it.

Then back to the corkboard, where there was their Doctor again, looking grizzled and disapproving. Then another man with a disapproving expression, except his face was slimmer and looked almost mournful. A very, very tall man followed, looking stately and wise. Then an old, nearly-bald man sporting a serious disfigurement across the left side of his face. A grinning, mad-looking man sporting an unkempt beard after that. Then a handsome man, just a tad younger, with excellent hair and a furrowed brow.

Tracking their eyes as they scanned the corkboard, Clive motioned for them to look at the over framed photo next, aged and tattered at the edges. It was of a rustic-looking woman with very long hair and a great big hat. After that, the last photo on the corkboard was of possibly the most handsome man Mickey had seen in his life, with jet-black hair, a hint of a smirk, and a very fashionable black suit.







“All the Doctor,” Clive asserted.

Rose was looking defeated, but all of this had begun to pique Mickey’s interest in the end.

“What’s this then?” he said, pointing to a chunky blue box that had cropped up in lots of the photos.

Clive took a deep breath.

“I have no idea.”

The three of them laughed together, relieved for some sort of commonality and sense between them at least.

“I don’t know everything!” continued Clive. “I keep wondering if it’s a mobile canteen.”

They exchanged a few more words about Clive’s life, the reasons he was so attached to these mysteries, this Doctor figure, but Rose and Mickey really figured they had to get going, even as Mickey felt himself slowly a bit intrigued by the whole thing in spite of himself.

“Just, if you, if you see him again,” said Clive, relenting as they finally made to leave, “will you please tell me. Can I come with you? You’ve met one. You, Rose, you’ve met him twice. If you meet him a third time, can I come with you? It’s all I’ve ever wanted. My whole life. Just to see the Doctor. To hear their voice. To look into their eyes. Can I? Please?”

They left him gently, moving back into the main house instead of the shed, when Clive’s wife pressed the home phone into Rose’s hand, looking utterly defeated, and stating that it was her mother on the line.

“Go get the car ready,” insisted Rose, “it’ll just take a moment to calm her down, please, we’ll all just get into a proper row if you get on too.”

Mickey saw the sense in that, and made his way back to his car, when he saw that black wheelie bin he’d parked near was shaking and thudding about.

“What’s this then?” he asked, moving towards it. “Okay, I’ll play your game.”

He reached out and grabbed hold of the bin, opening it expecting to find some kids inside moving it about for a laugh...but the bin was empty. Black and hollow. He slammed the lid down and stepped back, but found that he couldn’t. His hands were stuck to the lid.

“Shit,” he muttered, well tired of superglue pranks after Patrice had spent a good few months last year bothering everyone with increasingly creative variations on them. He pulled away, ready to lose some skin off his hand if he had too, since it would hardly be the first time.

But the plastic didn't give away. It just kept stretching out, until it pulled back, yanking Mickey inside.

Mickey woke up dazed, his muscles aching.

“Rose,” he murmured.

What had happened? The bin had somehow absorbed him. Where was Rose? Was she safe? Where was he?

He looked around. He was somewhere underground, surrounded by stairways and chains and ladders, everywhere bathed in red light. An enormous heaving orange mass undulated below him. Shop window dummies surrounded him. Plastic men.

Plastic.

He whimpered. This was all too much for him. He was so scared, not just for Rose, but for himself too.

The plastic men began to touch him, poke him, prod at him, coat him in some sort of warm, viscous goo. Then they left him for a time. When they returned, two Mickeys came with them. Plastic Mickeys.

“Rose Tyler,” they both said in unison.

“No!” cried the real Mickey. “Don't you dare!”

They prodded Mickey for a time, seemingly practising their impressions of him, trying to perfect themselves as copies, before one left him, and the other gagged him before locking him in some sort of vault.

Being literally replaced like this, being trapped, unable to help anyone, being held hostage by a literal menacing alien presence, it was like all his worst nightmares had conflated into the most terrifying proposal imaginable. His future had become a fucking nightmare.

Hours passed. Eventually, he heard some kind of commotion above him. He prayed that it was Rose, or the Doctor, or both. Anyone. He could hear voices...it was them!

"I know you're here," came the Doctor's gruff voice, projected loudly, bouncing off the walls. "Shadow Proclamation and all that, you really should talk with me, Nestene Consciousness."

The alien mass had screamed when he started talking, but was just gurgling now he'd finished.

"Thank you," said the Doctor.

The mass - the Nestene Consciousness, the Doctor had called it - made some noise of vague assent.

"Can I approach then?" the Doctor asked.

"Rose," Mickey heard himself say. "Rose, is that you?"

Only it wasn't him saying it. It was his voice, but he wasn't talking.

The copy. The plastic Mickey.

Mickey thrashed and wailed against his gag and he heard Rose talk to the fake version of him.

"Oh my god, Mickey!"

"I'm sorry," he heard the other Mickey sob. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

"Don't be daft. Doctor, it's Mickey, he's alive!"

"Good. Like I said, it was always a possibility."

"Thank god you were right. But Mickey, the Doctor has this all under control, I promise, but how the hell did you get here?"

"There was a bin, it pulled me inside. Big white light. Opened my eyes. I was here."

"Wait," said the Doctor. "It's not him."

"What?"

"Look at him. Really look."

"What are you talking about? Of course I'm me babes, baby, babyface boombastic."

Mickey heard a whirring sound, then the cover above him was detached and the Doctor pulled him out. Rose scrambled over to him, leaving the plastic Mickey behind, which looked around awkwardly like it was caught in a prank half-done.

All three of them quieted as the Doctor started loudly addressing the Nestene Consciousness again.

"I'm talking to the Heart of the Consciousness then? Right? Thank you. Can't help but notice, you infiltrated this planet by ships powered by, what, mass warp-shift neutrino? So might I suggest that you fuck offerino?"

The Nestene roared.

"Oh don't give me that bollocks."

As their argument continued, Mickey eyed off the plastic copy of him and clutched at Rose, who was doing her best to untie his gag.

"I can hear it," said Rose, shocked.

Mickey made a noise of confusion, and she went on to elaborate.

"That thing down there, it's like, when it talks I can almost make out words."

Mickey made another noise, which she accurately took for the right question.

"What's it saying? It sounds like...like, never....trust...time...lord."

"Last chance," barked the Doctor. "Are you gonna leave? No? Not gonna stop?"

Mickey mightn't have been able to hear any of its words like Rose could, but he understood the screech that followed as a very definite answer in the negative.

The Doctor sighed, bringing a blue vial up besides his face and uncorking it.

"Sometimes there just isn't another way," he said, spilling its contents down over the Nestene Consciousness.

It screeched and squealed, and plastic men began to swarm around them all, some grabbing Rose and Mickey and restraining them, but most making a beeline for the Doctor. He met them with his fists, eagerly decking them and tossing them down onto the Nestene Consciousnesses below.

Eventually the plastic men jerked and jolted, falling to their feet as the plastic that made them up seemed to transform to stiff, immobile rock. The Nestene itself made quieter

and quieter screeches until it screeched no more, its bright orange mass deadening to a hard grey stone.

Rose and Mickey back scrambled over to each other and embraced. Rose finally succeeded in tearing the gag out of Mickey's mouth.

"Rose," he gasped. "Rose. Rose."

Once they had a few moments to collect themselves, Rose phoning her mum to verify she was okay, Mickey peering at his duplicate to make sure it was really dead, the Doctor walked over to them.

"It's dead," he said to Mickey, who was still lingering by the duplicate of him. "Kick it."

Mickey did so. The plastic gave way, but the bits that had turned to stone remained hard and implacable.

"Don't have to worry about it now. Just a copy. It's gone. You're you, and it's not."

Mickey was surprised by how much more talkative the Doctor seemed with him now.

"What did you do to them?" he asked.

"The anti-plastic," interrupted Rose before he had a chance to answer.

"Yep," said the Doctor.

"So, we won?" asked Rose.

The Doctor barked a short laugh.

"To win stone isn't exactly my idea of a victory but, yeah, we won, if you like. Now let's get youse back home."

He took up a level, where he used his whirring metal rod to unlock a wall that had been hiding the chunky blue box from Clive's photos. Rose had presumably already been in it given her lack of reaction to the fact it was bigger on the inside. Mickey reeled, quietly crying and hating himself for it. The events of the day were all too much for him.

Once they stepped out of the box, which Rose had called the TARDIS like it was the most normal thing in the world, they were in an alleyway not far from the Powell Estate.

"Pretty close," said the Doctor, sounding chuffed with himself, as they exited it together. He lingered by the doorway, while Rose and Mickey moved several metres back, by some junk wood lining the street.

"Why'd you just pour the anti-plastic on them?" asked Rose. "I mean, you saved us, but you didn't even give them a chance."

"If they were the type to give you lot a chance, they wouldn't have come here in the first place. Tonnes of uninhabited planets out there with decent conditions they could live on. Didn't choose those, did they? Chose here. I gave them what they deserved."

"But couldn't there have been another way?"

"Sometimes there just isn't another way. Sometimes your enemies will leave you without any other choices, and you've got to be ready for that eventuality. If you're not ready to make that decision, it will be the end of you and everyone that you've ever cared about. You can always give them one more chance to change, but nothing more than that."

None of them said anything for a moment after that. The Doctor scratched his stubble.

"Travels anywhere, you know," he said, nodding at the TARDIS.

"It's a time machine," said Mickey.

"How d'you figure that?" asked Rose.

"He's right," said the Doctor, before Mickey could add his inferences from Clive's photos. "Damn right it's a time machine."

There was another pregnant pause.

"Are you alone in there then?" asked Rose.

"Yeah. Not always, but...long time now, yeah."

"Do you want to be?"

Silence.

"Not really," he eventually answered. "Youse could come with me, if you want."

Rose looked at Mickey. He was burning with shame as the tears kept rolling down his face. He wished he could stop it, but it was so much, everything that had happened was so overwhelming. He wished he could be as cool about it as they were, but he just

wanted to get back to normalcy, back home, back with Mook and Patrice and Sally...he wanted Rose there happy and content in the ways deep down he knew she wasn't.

"I can't," Rose said to the Doctor. "I've got to go and find my mum and someone's got to look after this stupid lump, so..."

"No worri-" started the Doctor, before Mickey interrupted him.

"I will."

"What?" asked Rose.

"I'll go. Time and space, bring it on."

"Mickey, what are you talking about, why are you doing this? What about your mates? Your band? Your job?"

"Rose, you didn't even recognise me," he said through tears. "He saw that copy was just plastic, but you didn't."

"Mickey..."

"I want to do this. It's not just for you, I want to do it, properly. I don't want to end up like Clive. We'll never get a chance like this again, will we?"

"I don't think so," answered Rose slowly.

"Then let's do it."

"Together?" asked Rose.

"Together."

"Well," said the Doctor, looking a bit embarrassed by their theatrics, "come on then."

The Doctor waved them in, entering the TARDIS and leaving the door open for them.

Mickey and Rose grabbed each other's hands, and ran towards the rest of their lives.

Parallelism

by Gallifrey Immigrant

What if Nilso's alternate timeline Doctors had a story together penned by an author that isn't Nilso?

Author's Note: Thank you Nilso, for letting me use your creations, in order of first appearance here being Sean Bean, John Cleese, Alan Rickman, Jacqueline Pearce, Ciarán Hinds, Ray Winstone, Ben Kingsley, and David Bowie.

Aria pointed her foil at the man who was on the floor. He raised his hands in surrender, his eyes fearful. With his black jacket, he looked like some form of soldier, and his accent was of the English. Why he was in France, Aria couldn't know. But she did know that she wanted the red jewel that he had around his neck.

"I know you," he said. His hair was blonde, and combed back slightly. "I'm the Doctor. You're going to try to steal this jewel around my neck, yes?"

"You're the Doctor? I knew a Doctor once. Well, let's cut to the chase. Yes, I want that jewel. It'll fit in my collection rather well."

"And if I told you it was cursed, would that change your mind?" said the Doctor. "What if I told you that this jewel leaves ruin in its wake?"

Aria thrust the foil to his neck. "I'd say hand it over."

The Doctor's face stayed blank. He nodded at Aria, and handed her the jewel. There wasn't that much resistance, more resignation to his fate.

"Is that all?" he asked.

“Tempted as I am to ask you to give me your clothes as well, I have to dash,” said Aria, giving him a flirty smile. The man was rather handsome, if a bit strange. She quietly walked out the door, keeping her eyes in his direction as she left the room.

The chaos of the French Revolution had enveloped her, hiding her crimes from the police. Many people were dying now, some of them less deserving than others. She had assumed that she had escaped her fate, that she had somehow thwarted heaven’s judgment.

Then the fever ran through her body, wracking her mind. All the jewelry in the world had done nothing for her, as mucus filled her nose, and sweating and convulsions became her day-to-day turmoil. The doctors could do little for her, and she knew that she was going to die.

Then a mild-mannered man in a green bowtie appeared. He was a stoutly fellow, with hair that looked slightly messy. He claimed to be the Doctor, and said he was here to help her. However, he seemed more interested in snooping around her room, and Aria suspected that he was a rival thief, here to steal her riches.

Useless of him, of course. She had sold all her misbegotten wares already. All of her wares, except the red jewel. It was clenched in her hand, as if it compelled her to keep it.

The Doctor stopped looking under her bed, and finally began to look at her. “My greatest apologies for disturbing you under these conditions! I do not intend to seem or sound particularly ghastly and unappreciative of one’s current physical frailty, ma’am, but I do believe that you seem to be under the weather, somewhat. .”

She coughed up bloody phlegm, and said “How astute of you.”

Then he noticed the jewel in her hand, and his eyes went wide. She immediately clenched her jewel even tighter, as he reached for it.

“Where did you get that?” asked the Doctor.

“A Doctor gave it to me,” she said.

“You say a ‘Doctor’ gave you that jewel? If I may say so, my dear, that is an impossibly, and increasingly worrying statement; what you hold there in your hand is an illegal alien artefact currently prohibited in no less than 76 star systems! What sort of a Doctor would willingly hand you such a dangerous object? In my mind, only the worst class of scoundrel would have... unless...” said the Doctor. His face crumbled, and he placed it in his hands, shaking it.

“What’s wrong?” asked Aria.

“I’ve made a mistake. A terrible mistake. The silver woman was right, oh she was...”

The Doctor shook his head, and said “No matter. I’ll do the best I can for you.”

And he never mentioned it again. All things told, he was a nice Doctor, if a bit befuddled, and far too talkative.

Eventually, Aria went into the blackness of death, and didn’t wake up.

Until nearly a century later.

The Doctor walked up the stairs of the Silos church, ignoring the stares from the people surrounding him. This place is meant for only women, and so a person of his physical appearance looks out of place. His body was of a man of imposing stature, with a well-defined face, and grim eyes, the color of the sea. He has been here before, of course, back in his body not 3 regenerations or so ago. At that point, the Doctor appeared like a woman. He cringes at the memory of his (her?) overly scrupulous body back then...far too precocious. That version had dressed in white, a pithy story about heroism at her lips all the time. He now preferred to simply do things, and not talk about them. Much more efficient.

Sister Anna saw him, and smiled. She had aged a bit, but she was still as bubbly as ever. It made him sad for what would be needed soon.

“Doctor, hello. You look different,” said Anna.

The Doctor sniffed. “It’s the graying hair, I think.”

"Yes, among other things. You do understand that us bringing in a man is a technical violation of our Order's rules?"

"That's where you're mistaken. I was not a woman before, nor am I a man now," said the Doctor. (Anna seemed unconvinced.) "And some things are more important than the rules of your faith. Where is the girl?"

"Further inside. Can you help her?" she asked.

"I'll do my best," said the Doctor.

"Ah, that's all one can hope for," said Anna, sighing wearily. The Doctor wondered what Anna had seen in the years to make her sigh that way. He chose not to ask her.

Anna led him down the hallway that winded down. It was later in the day, and he could feel the blinding rays of sunlight that was the last attempt by the sun to give the planet light, before the sunset arrived. She opened the door to a room in the back of the church. It revealed a sparse place, filled with writings on the wall. The Doctor immediately noted that all the writing was in French, combined with sparse English.

A black-skinned girl was writing in a book. She ignored Anna and the Doctor, and it took Anna clearing her throat before the girl turned around. Immediately, the Doctor noticed the red jewel around the girl's neck.

"You're the Doctor," said the girl.

"Yes. Were you expecting me?" he asked.

"No. But Aria recognizes you. All your bodies have the same unflinching gaze."

"I do hope that's a compliment," said the Doctor.

"Doctor, this is Beth. She is someone the missionaries found, who was taken to our church to save her immortal soul," said Anna. "She is possessed by some spirit called Aria, writing in some odd tongue."

"Ah yes, the demonic tongue of the Napoleon-era French," said the Doctor. Steeling himself up, he continued "Anna, you are extremely useless on every level I could

imagine. If you don't want to cause any more damage than you already have, I suggest you leave me to my business."

"Doctor, I--"

"Go."

She walked away. The Doctor hoped that she would forgive him later. He hadn't enjoyed being cruel then, but she needed to be as far away as possible if she was to survive.

Turning to Beth, he crouched down to her eye level. Her posture drew back, and he could tell she was afraid. He smiled at her, and held out a hand to shake. After a moment, she shook it.

Good. He didn't want to scare the girl, if he didn't have to.

"Hello. Do you know what the jewel around your neck signifies?" asked the Doctor, pointing a black-gloved finger at the glinting object.

"It's given me Aria. She says that the jewel has made her immortal. That it'll make me immortal," said Beth.

"Do you believe her?" asked the Doctor.

Beth opened her mouth, and then stopped. At first he thinks it's indecision, but then he realizes she's listening to Aria.

"Because if you believe her, then you're an idiot," continued the Doctor. "Aria's nothing but a career criminal beyond her expiration date. Her time is over. You're listening to a corpse that doesn't know she's rotting, and doesn't have the sense to die with dignity."

Beth's eye color changed from brown to bright blue, and she said, in a French accent, "You made me this way. You made me a corpse."

"You chose to steal from me. You chose to take the red jewel of the Osirans. Do not blame me for your vicissitude," the Doctor said calmly.

"You think I blame you for that—oh dear. You are the clueless one, Doctor," said Beth.

“Enough. You’re coming with me,” said the Doctor. He reached for her, but Beth ran out the door, as he knew she would.

He checked his pocket watch. It was time.

“Beth!” he called out. “Did Aria tell you the price of being immortal?”

He followed the girl, who stopped. Her blue eyes stared at him with anger, and he knew it was Aria listening to him.

“You can feel the hunger, can’t you? You must be wondering why.” said the Doctor. “Resurrections require a cost.”

“GET OUT!” screamed Aria.

From her body released a haze of red dust. It exploded through the church, zapping the life force of whoever was around. Nuns throughout the building began to age by several years, their vitality having been drawn into the Osiran jewel. Some of them died, their bodies ground into bone. Beth’s eyes rolled to the back of her head, as the energy wrapped itself around her.

The Doctor felt the drain as well. For him, it was only a couple of decades worth of loss. He simply stood there, knowing that he could not interfere. Not yet.

And then it was over. Beth’s eyes returned to brown coloring, and her eyes slowly focused.

“What happened?” she asked.

“You murdered people,” said the Doctor. “What happens next is up to you. Either you face justice by giving up the jewel, or you run.”

Beth hesitated, and for a moment the Doctor thought this might be over. Then Aria took over, and she ran out the door.

The Doctor sighed wearily, and followed. He ignored the calls for help within the church, and kept on running till he left outside. Beth was rather nimble, and he could barely keep up with her. And then he was stopped. A strong grip caught his arm, and he turned

to see his younger self of several regenerations ago. The one with the white hat, and white coat, with long black hair, and sharp elfin eyes, the one in the body of a woman.

The self-righteous one. He found her silly, but he needed her right now.

"I felt an energy surge happen inside there. What happened?" said Ms. White Hat.

"The Osiran Jewel used their life-force to recharge," said the Doctor.

"Why didn't you stop it? Those people are innocent bystanders," said White Hat.

"For one, because I'm your future, and I can't change time. Do what you're good at. Help the injured," said the Doctor. He didn't have time for her replies, and kept to the pace.

Tracking her through the forest was a long journey. He wondered if he had been right to leave his earlier self to deal with the aftermath of the journey. In the end, it didn't matter if it was wrong or right, he had to find Aria. He had to end this madness.

He found her near the ocean's edge. She stared at him, with several fragments of thought running through her facial expressions.

"Give me the jewel," he says.

She breathed in and out, and then handed it over. "I didn't know I'd..."

"Yes, you didn't know. And you'll have to live with that. That's not my job to deal with," said the Doctor. He walked off, the sounds of her tears in his hindsight.

"Where is it!" screamed the stowaway on the pirate ship. His matted grey hair smelled of the sea, and the Captain had to hold his nose to stop the stench of dirt from reaching him.

"Where is what, matey?" asked the Captain.

"The jewel...oh god, I've lost it. I've had it with me for years, and I've lost it in the sea," he said. "Oh, I'm a horrible Doctor. A horrible one."

“What sort of jewel?”

“A jewel that trapped the wearer’s soul forever. It has Aria,...I wonder who it will get next.”

Veronica Marseilles looked out the window at the city she owned underneath. It taken years of experience setting up this plan. Getting people to sign off on selling their life’s work, manipulating the current people in charge, promising a politician here, blackmailing a person there. And if anyone was absolutely determined to get in her way, she could take their life, literally.

Her hands fondled the red jewel at her neck. It held the souls of her “advisors”, the previous wielders of the jewel. Each one of them had taught her the skills she had used to climb the ranks. They had been her mentors since childhood, people to ease the loneliness of her growing years.

As she watched over her city, she wondered to herself whether it had been worth it, now that it was aflame.

“You feel proud, eh?” said a voice behind her.

She looked in the window glass reflection. A man was there, dressed in a disgruntled red suit and tie. His gaze was like a judge, with a rough look about him. His face was slightly unshaven, but his hair was cut rather well. Veronica knew the face was just a mask, of course.

“Proud of what?” she asked.

“Of escaping from me. Of ruling an entire city. Must feel pretty good, even with the blood on your ‘ands,” said the Doctor.

“If you mean the people I drained to power my jewel, then I hope you know I don’t regret killing them. They were all murderers, thieves, leeches on the poor and downtrodden. I did a world a service by killing them,” she said. Outside, she could see cinders rising. Most people had been evacuated from the city, but that didn’t mean their possessions wouldn’t be lost. The Doctor had caused a lot of destruction in order to find her.

Kill him.

She could hear Max the second host, screaming in her ear. She ignored him. His suggestions always got her into trouble. She could feel the others simply waiting in her mind, watching through her eyes. Aria was in the background, withholding her thoughts.

"I s'pose you did. I'm not here to judge you. I've done worse. But," said the Doctor, "I still can't let you go."

Veronica sighed deeply, and then turned around. What she was planning required an utmost amount of focus.

"I like your new form, Doctor. Haven't seen you look so rugged before," said Veronica with a smile. It was meant to distract him, but he had no reaction to her charm. "How long has it been since Aria took that jewel from you?"

"It's been a while. That's why I want to finish this here and now," said the Doctor.

"And then what happens to Aria? And to all the other lives saved in that gem?"

"Not my business," said the Doctor.

"Then whose business is it? Because my city is burning, and all because you were on a crusade to find me. What crime was I committing? Spending a few lives, to save hundreds?"

"It's not just your life. Every single person who uses that jewel takes countless lives, across time. If I let that jewel stay with you, that's countless lives on my conscience. I lost that jewel, and it's my job to keep it out of evil hands."

"'Evil hands'? I thought you weren't judging," snarled Veronica. Out the side of her eyes, she saw the ship with Erica flying out safely. Grinning inwardly, she felt the previous hosts leave her mind. It had worked.

"Fine," she said. "I'll give in. Just let my city go."

The Doctor raised his eyebrows. After a long pause, he said "Sure. Give me the jewel, and we'll talk about it."

Veronica nodded, and passed the fake jewel to his hand. By the time he would realize it was a fake, Erica, her daughter and inheritor of the voices that used to be in Veronica's head, would be in another galaxy.

The Sygnas only noted the problem with the Silver Goddess when it was too late.

The Goddess had offered the Sygnas constant good fortune and power. The cosmos of the 61st century was unforgiving of late, but the Goddess had helped organize the defenses, create an economy, and ensured peace throughout the planet. Her benevolence was known by every Sygna, and many of them would pray to the silver-skinned humanoid, who could often be recognized by the red jewel embedded in her chest.

It was said that the Goddess had the consciousnesses of 50 people, each one a life she had lived. Often a priest had found the Goddess speaking to herself in conversation, as if she was in argument. It was said that those who were sacrificed might be added to the Goddess's mind, being cleansed by her holy light of sin as their life left them. Some criminals even prayed to be killed on the altar of the Goddess.

And then the Goddess began to go mad.

She began to complain of "hidden actors", and started to accuse the priests of plotting against her. When they disagreed, she tried to drain them of life. Something went wrong, though, and she began to become hysterical.

"The Doctor has subverted my power!" screamed out the Goddess.

Her wrath could not find this Doctor, and so it turned on the Sygnas. The entire society went into chaos, as she began to disrupt the very foundation of the world. Ultimately, the Sygnas had to trap the Goddess in an inescapable prison, which was constructed by a mysterious mustachioed man known as John Smith. No one knew who he was, or where he came from. The Sygnas only knew that after being in the prison, no one heard from the Goddess.

Except. One priest said he saw a conversation between 2 individuals. The aforementioned John Smith, and a white-hat wearing woman humanoid with a white coat, called the Doctor.

The Doctor stared at the dark-skinned mustached man in front of her. That man had completely disrupted her plans. After having seen the effects of the Osiran jewel on the Silos Church, and having been left by her utterly horrific future self to fix the damage, the Doctor had been determined to track down the jewel's whereabouts. Having located it in this part of space, it had only taken a bit of planning to disrupt the signal between the jewel and the host. The "Goddess"'s powers had begun to fail her, and the Doctor had been prepared to apprehend her.

And then this man showed up. He had a hungry glare to his eyes, and his robes looked dusty and mismatched, like he had stolen them from a rack. A small beard covered his lightly tanned face, which was covered with odd scars, and a cane was in his left hand, though he didn't seem to need it.

"Who are you?" asked the Doctor.

"Do you know why you lose so many times? Because you ask the wrong questions," said the man.

"Why are you here?"

"Fixing a mistake," said the man. "A mistake that I made a while ago."

"The Goddess?"

"Again, wrong question," he said, turning to walk away.

"You're me from the future, right?" asked the Doctor.

He turned back around, and smirked. "If I was, would it matter?"

"Well, it might be important," said the Doctor.

“You don’t even know what the word ‘important’ means. The Osiran jewel was a side-problem I had to handle, before going onto bigger things. There is a shatterpoint brewing in the fabric of reality, darker things spouting in the world-tree. Important? Ha!”

“What happens to the Goddess?”

“She will stay alone, forevermore. It’s the only way to keep the jewel from spreading further.”

“Will I remember this?”

“No. You won’t.”

Then he walked away.

The Doctor blinked her eyes, and then began looking wildly around. Why was she here again?

Aria, even lost in this void, locked in the mind of the Goddess, could still recall when she was a young girl in France. And she could still remember her mentor, the Doctor.

He was a tanned man, with a wiry mustache and a sharp gaze. He often walked with a cane, as a way to complete the illusion that he was infirmed. His face was covered with mysterious scars, which he never told her how he received them. She learned from him how to steal, exactly how to act so as to avoid suspicion. He taught her how to mimic those of the upper classes, how to blend in with them perfectly, so they would let down their guard, and reveal their things.

And he would fence with her every night. Despite his apparent age, he was spry, and she often found herself out of breath as they clashed blades. She rarely ever won, but toward the end of her apprenticeship, she often got close.

She loved him as a father, and wanted him to stay forever. But one day he told her that she no longer needed him, and that it was time for him to leave.

“I can do no more. History must take care of you now.”

As she cried herself to sleep that night, she had no idea what he meant. But now she knew.

She still didn't know quite who the Doctor was. She knew that they time travelled, and that they were one consciousness in several bodies. She now knew that she and them had met in asynchronous order, so she couldn't be sure how much of her history her mentor had known. But he must have known something.

Had he wanted to change her life? Had he hoped that perhaps, he could change her fate? Was she fated to always have this Osiran jewel, lost in a countless symphony of minds, crowded in a new body each time? Did it matter?

As she pondered these thoughts, while sitting in the garden that was now her prison, a wheezing, grinding sound echoed through the air. She felt the host mind become curious, and walk to the source.

Ah. There was the unmistakable blue box of the TARDIS. A blonde-haired man stepped out slowly, looking around. He wore a blue coat, with a yellow-spotted shirt underneath. Blue pants covered what looked like slightly hairy legs. Overall, she sensed an easygoing air about him, supported by the way he whistled while he walked through the garden, unaware of being watched.

She pushed the host consciousness to approach him, who, after a moment of thought, obliged. The man noticed the silver-skinned woman approaching, and waved.

"Hello, I'm the Doctor. Just passing through randomly. I do like to wander," said the Doctor.

She realized he neither recognized her, nor the jewel. He must be early in the cycle of lives. Perhaps this was the first time they ever met.

"I am the Goddess. Or I once was. I've been imprisoned," said the Goddess.

"Why?" he asked.

She, the Goddess, Erica, and all the other consciousnesses thought quickly, but intensely. Should they lie?

No. The time for tricks had past.

"I possess a jewel from the Osirans. It keeps all the wearers of it alive in the minds of the current wearer, but at the expense of other lives. I cannot exist in the universe with other humans, so I must be banished here, as was the jewel."

The Doctor frowned. He took out his silver wand, and waved it around. "Intriguing. There's a barrier to the rest of the universe here. Meant to keep signals in and out. Probably meant to keep your jewel from accessing anyone else's life force."

"Perhaps. I have seen no one for years."

"Yes, you have a universe to yourself. Rather lonely existence though. What sort of person would design such a thing?"

"I deserve it, I think. I killed many people. I tried to make sure it was only bad people."

The Doctor focused on her intensely. Was he judging her? She couldn't tell.

She continued "It is best if I stay here. If I escape, the jewel will just find another. It always does."

He placed a finger to his lips, and hummed to himself. "How many lives have you lived?"

"Hundreds," said the Goddess. "And you, Doctor?"

"Not as many as you, but I've been around," said the Doctor. He stretched, and said "Do you want to share stories? I've got some time to spend."

"I think that'd be nice. I miss company," said the Goddess.

And so they swapped stories. The Goddess told him about stealing as Aria, about her time as a pirate queen on the seas, about her life as Max, a soldier in the WWII, and her life as Jill, a nurse on the German side of WW1, about her life as a Silurian explorer to Mars, and then back in Earth in time to be a venture capitalist. She talked about being both a husband and a wife, about having time-traveled, about battling against space worms, about surviving a shark attack, and about saving a rainforest. She avoided details that his future self would recognize, of course.

The Doctor had his own stories to tell, and occasionally he did. But he mostly listened. When she slept, he would occasionally go off into the garden, deep into the forest, and

tinker with something. When he slept, she would watch him, wondering what exactly he dreamed about.

They played games, they danced, they sang. But mostly they told stories.

“Doctor,” she said one day to him. They were both resting on the grass. “Will you promise me something?”

“What?” asked the Doctor. His eyes were closed, but she knew him well-enough to know he was listening.

“One day, in the past, there is a girl named Aria. She is dying of a fever, and carries the Osiran jewel. If you get there in time, perhaps you can stop her from using it.”

“I may not have the power to change that. As long as the jewel is in this universe, it can find a host.”

“I see. Yes, I figured. But if you do happen to get there too late, at least take good care of her. Make her comfortable in her dying days, please.”

The Doctor opened his eyes, and looked straight at her. “I promise I will do what I can. It may take me some time to get to it, but I promise I will do it.”

The Goddess leaned over and kissed his cheek softly. She felt his cheek heat with a bashful embarrassment.

“Thank you, Doctor.”

And so they rested. Until finally, he left her alone. He simply walked to the TARDIS, and went on his way.

But.

In her hands, he left her a key, and a map.

The Goddess pushed the key into the lock, and opened it. The Doctor had, while she slept, been building a door into the garden. As she walked through it, she felt a searing pain in her mind, and she heard the Osiran jewel break into pieces. Then she fell into darkness.

“Doctor!” said Illithica. “There’s someone in the void.”

“Really?” said the Doctor, her bright brown eyes opening widely. “Then let’s let them in.”

“Are they even alive?” asked Miaki. The furry winged creature crawled up Illithica’s shoulder, and raised his eyebrows. Although, he didn’t have any eyebrows, but still tried for the equivalent.

The Doctor quickly yanked the doors open, nearly tugging her brim hat off in the process, and pulled the person in. She was a silver-skinned woman, wearing a golden headdress. Splinters of red crystals were all over her body.

“Is she alive?” repeated Miaki.

The Doctor reached down, and felt for a pulse. She nodded.

The silver-skinned woman opened her eyes, and said “Where am I? Am I in the garden still?”

“No, you’re in the TARDIS,” said Illithica.

The woman shot up. She touched the red crystal fragments, and said “It’s over. Oh my god, it’s over.”

“What is?”

“The jewel. I think he brought me to a new universe. He stopped the signal.”

“Who did?”

“The Doctor.”

“I’m the Doctor. Who are you?”

The woman with countless names smiled. “What a question. I’ve been kings and queens and thieves. But today, you can call me Aria.”

Framing Story: Part 3

Room Lighting

by Neo

"That's not how it happened."

"What?"

"Rose. The Doctor. The Doctors."

"Well, it's like that message at the start said, isn't it? Events of other universes and all that?"

"I know a Doctor that ended up in another universes and believe me, he was nothing like that."

"Well, the message said not to be disturbed and that none of this actually happened, yeah? Nothing to be worried about then."

Jack didn't respond to Gwen. He just kept on frowning.

"You alright Gwen?" asked Owen. "You keep rubbing your head."

"I feel like I've forgotten something, something important."

"That'd be our missing teammate, wouldn't it?"

"I suppose, yeah."

"What's that noise?" asked Jack, standing up suddenly.

Gwen listened. It was quiet in the barn about from the hum of the makeshift projector, but...there was some kind of hissing, slithering type of sound.

"It's the tape," said Owen, pointing.

Below the VCR player, where Owen was placing tapes after they'd finished watching them, one of the reels of tape had gotten free and was pooling out onto the floor.

"They're not meant to do that, are they?" asked Gwen. "I've had tapes unravel on me in the middle of the film, nothing drove Rhys madder - thank god for DVDs - but never when they're just...sitting there."

“No,” said Owen, kicking the tape aside and stamping on it. “They’re not.”

“What’d you do that for?” barked Jack. “We could have learned something from that.”

Gwen rolled her eyes as Owen and Jack went on to argue, and kept poking around at the shelves of tapes. She found a shelf labelled “alternate Doctors” and pulled out some tapes that looked to be in good condition.

“Jack, look here,” she said, holding up four tapes, “more Doctor.”

“We’ll see about that,” he replied, all complaints about Owen’s decision to watch the tapes as advised apparently gone.

Gwen grew so engrossed as the tape started to play that she barely noticed a Shadow grabbing Owen as the room’s lights glowed brighter and brighter, casting the projected video in a garish, harshly reflected light.

The tape continued to play. Gwen continued to watch.

The Library Of Antigone

by The Other

What if Eddie Redmayne was the Doctor?

These were the last days of the planet known as Antiqua. Actually, these were the last hours. The binary stars the planet orbited had been knocked out of their seemingly eternal dance, and were soon to collide together. On the planet below, the air itself felt ancient and pensive, as if the entire collective consciousness of a long dead people hung in the atmosphere and was being inhaled and exhaled with every breath by the one sentient being remaining. In a way, this was entirely correct. The civilization of the planet Antiqua had long since died out. No more would the great halls ring with scholarly debate, or be filled with the rifling of pages. The Great Library of Antigone, capital of Antiqua (and at its height, the greatest collection of knowledge in the universe), had long since fallen to ruin. In a word, it smelled like history.

The one sentient being, a lone figure, walked down one of the libraries great and decaying passageways. The light of Antiqua's twin suns seeped through cracked walls, illuminating decaying desks and overgrown bookshelves. The alien foliage had nearly taken back what remained of this ancient construct; it was a struggle for the figure to simply make their way down the hall. If there had been any observers, they would quickly take notice that whoever this was, this lone figure had come woefully unprepared for a journey to a long-dead civilization. They seemingly brought no tools to cut through the dense growth; the tall, lanky silhouette was simply weaving through the trees and great, luminescent mushroom like entities that had reclaimed their former home. It was not wearing any sort of survival gear. It was simply yet elegantly clad in brown loafers, ash grey slacks, a sky blue collared shirt and a perfectly fitting deep blue cardigan. The only object of note the figure carried was a large leather satchel, which seemed to be nearly full to bursting. This silhouettes destination: the giant, beautifully crafted double doors at the end of the great hall. Each door depicted scenes from Antiquan history. From the founding of Antigone and the first books donated to the library, right up to a carving of many diverse species from across the universe studying in the very hall the doors sat in.

After what seemed like hours of struggling, the figure finally reached its destination. With a sigh of excitement that was tinged with just a hint of anxiousness, it heaved the door open. It was surprisingly easy to push for all of it's ornate glory. A testament to

Antiquan craftsmanship; impressively built yet strikingly light. As the door swung open, a sight unseen for millennia met the beholders eyes - for as the great section of missing ceiling casting light into the monstrously large room revealed, it was indeed a he: the once beautiful Cathedral of Antigone, where what was deemed the universe's most valuable knowledge was stored for only the most revered scholars to read. With light now upon his face, his features were made clear. He was a young man with dark brown hair and eyes the color of a calm ocean. At the moment, those eyes displayed a sense of childlike wonder.

At last! he thought to himself. A sight I have merely read about is manifest. The universe truly is a remarkable place. While the rest of the library was in disrepair, the cathedral seemed to be in surprisingly good condition. Besides the one giant hole in the ceiling, it looked as if the cathedral hadn't seen the light of day in eons. The walls of the levels upon levels of the massive dome were all lined with the cosmos most rare and prized tomes, and they all seemed to be in incredibly good shape considering the circumstances. The sections directly under the collapsed portion of the ceiling were utterly ruined, but otherwise all was as it had been left. Besides, he - this lover of books - was only here for one thing in particular. I must control my impulses he thought to himself. As much as I want to nab every book in here, I think I've about ran out of time. It was true. According to his one of a kind watch, which could display any time he needed (be it how long until the tea was done or how much time was left until a galaxy shaking catastrophe), he had only about half an Antiquan hour left before the stars collided. For him, that meant he had about fifteen minutes. As if on cue, the whole planet shook and seemed to be tearing itself apart. He was no fool. He hadn't come to the Great Library of Antigone on a whim or with a death wish, he had come with a purpose: to seek out a very particular and peculiar tome, one that spoke of a very ancient, very dangerous mythical being that terrorized the universe in ancient times. The only copy in existence, and for him it was the key to the future.

Okay! Concentrate. Here for a reason, don't get distracted. Let's see... would it be under? Myths? Children's stories? Horror? Arcane Arts? He flew up the spiral staircases, sprinting from one section to another. His mind itself was like that of a vast library; always cataloging every scrap of information in the belief that it would one day be useful. But right now, his great mental library wasn't exactly being helpful. He had checked Children's stories, Horror, and Arcane Arts with no luck. He was running out of time now. He had been thrown to the ground at least twice (he wasn't really paying attention to the tremors), and the light from the hole in the ceiling had become almost unbearably bright. Okay. Think. What do we know about the Antiquans? He stopped to catch his breath. He was going to need it to escape the destruction of the solar system.

He sat down, crossed his legs, and began rubbing his temples as he so often did when entering what he called his mental library.

He was now sprinting through his mental library, calling up everything he knew about Antiquan society from government to religion and everything in between. Anything that helped him understand their filing system. At last, one stray piece of information grabbed his attention. For all of their advanced understanding of the universe, Antiquans had very superstitious beliefs about the origin of the universe and events that came before the founding of their library. For them, the library was civilization.

Everything before that was ancient history.

History. Myth. Ancient. Superstitious. All pieces of the puzzle, and just like that, they all snapped into place. Ancient History. It's in Ancient History. As soon as those pieces snapped into place, he pulled himself out of his library and back into the Antiquan one. Or what was left of it. While he had been rummaging through his catalogs, the planet had begun to fall apart. Whole sections of the cathedral wall were coming down now, and it seemed to be raining books. The noise was deafening, and as the ceiling collapsed in further, the light and heat were almost too much for him. He was up and off dodging parts of the collapsing ceiling, vaulting over piles of books, and nearly falling down flights of stairs. Luckily, the giant section heading for Ancient History was pretty close to the massive double doors. The real trouble would be finding the book.

As he neared Ancient History, the rest of the ceiling finally gave way. As it collapsed in on itself, he ducked into a massive arch just to his right. As the dust settled, he was sure he'd never hear again. It's a good thing I spend most of my time reading. Watch me ever leave my beloved library again after this fun little excursion. He crawled over the collapsed ceiling and was pelted with the seemingly never ending hail of books as he made his way towards what was left of the Ancient History section. Please, please let it still be here. And in one piece. Once he reached the cracking and heaving bookcase that used to be Ancient History, he began skimming the titles of each book. The telepathic translation unique to his race kicked in, and right before his eyes, the Antiquan title of each book morphed into Latin, his preferred and favorite old Earth language. The planet shook, the books fell, and yet he frantically and stubbornly refused to leave without his desired book. Jokes were always made about how he'd eventually die in a library if it was destroyed and he wasn't done collecting books from it yet, and now it looked as if that really was about to happen. Then, two words caught his eye. There it was. Inceptum Finis. Beginning of the End. He reached for the ancient book, and as it slid into his hands, he caressed it and blew the centuries of accumulated dust from it's cover. It was surprisingly plain looking for something that was supposedly so unique.

Another great shake reminded him of the inevitable and brought him out of his trance. His watch blared an alarm; three minutes. He made his way towards the door while opening his seemingly full satchel. Inside, there had to be at least 30 or so of his favorite books, poetry collections, and essays. For a second, he was concerned that this latest edition to his collection wouldn't fit, but chuckled at himself as he remembered another gift unique to his people. Everything we make is bigger on the inside. His watch blared again; two minutes left.

The sight that greeted him outside of the now irreparable cathedral was not a pleasant one. The almost completely leveled hall was mostly on fire from direct sunlight. The portions of wall still standing were shaking so badly that they seemed ready to topple at any second. Luckily, he didn't have far to go. His transportation was waiting at the end of the wrecked hall. To an outsider, it appeared as if his transportation was a moldy, rotting bookshelf. But to him and any of his people, it was far more than just that. He took off sprinting, careful to avoid the blinding sunlight now bathing the hall. His watch blared again. One minute.

He was so close now. Running ever so fast, and gaining ground quickly. He only hoped he was running faster than his time. Fires sprang up on all sides. The air itself seared his skin. His ears bled from the sound of destruction that seemed to permeate the fabric of reality. The ground opened up in great and terrible fissures, spewing fire and molten rock. One last push he was telling himself. You can make it. Don't panic. The rotting bookcase was so close now. Only a few more steps. His watch blared its final warning.

FIVE. He mustered every last ounce of his strength.

FOUR. His muscles tensed, his skin burned, his mind and body prepared for the worst.

THREE. He leapt for the bookcase.

TWO. He slammed into it with all of his might. The last thing he remembered was the horrible heat, the molten rock, the blinding light, and the roar of a solar system's death.

ONE. Suddenly, it was very cold and very dark.

Greater Good

Or: The Doctor tries the diplomatic approach to ethical conundrums

by Bottle Universe

What if Avery Brooks played a diplomat Doctor?

The journey to the Peacekeeper orbital had taken the best part of two weeks, and Alyce Sinclair was willing to do just about anything in order to stretch her legs. She'd heard stories about travellers' muscles atrophying beyond recognition. No way was that going to happen to her.

As the shuttle made its final approach to the station, Alyce took the opportunity to have one last look through her notes. She'd been recommended for the position of diplomatic attache by a lecturer at the Mars University and was determined not to mess the opportunity up. Peacekeeper was the only thing keeping most of the races of the Twelve Galaxies from leaping at one another's throats.

The previous Earth ambassador had vanished suddenly in mysterious circumstances which Alyce was trying to not think too hard about. His replacement, a wildcard presumably transferred from another department, had already managed to alienate most of the diplomatic staff. Alyce supposed that should worry her, but in a way she was strangely grateful. Any chance for her to get some work experience before moving up the ranks would do nicely. Even if that meant working under a boss of uncertain origin.

Once the shuttle had finished docking, Alyce went straight to the office of the Earth Ambassador. Her destination was on the far side of the orbital—just her luck—and she was out of breath by the time she arrived. She peered into the room and made eye contact with the man sitting behind the desk.

'Come in,' he called, drumming his fingers on the table. She nodded awkwardly and entered, doing her best not to knock anything over. It was easier said than done: the office seemed filled to bursting by nicknacks and trinkets from a hundred different planets. Someone needed to come in here and give the place a good old clean, thought Alyce, before deciding to keep the observation to herself.

'Sit down,' said the man, gesturing to a chair. 'I'm the Doctor, and you must be...' His eyes roamed around for a few moments before settling on a sheet of paper. 'Alyce Sinclair. Welcome to Peacekeeper, Alyce.' He picked up the document. 'Your qualifications are good, your cover letter seemed adequate...' He started at her. 'Are you listening to me?'

'Sorry,' said Alyce, snapping out of her fugue. 'It's just... paper. No one uses paper these days.'

'I do,' he said, more than a little defensively. They sat in silence for a few moments. Then, apropos of nothing, he asked, 'What if I told you I wasn't really a human being at all?'

'I'd say, "it's a bit strange that you're representing the planet Earth for a living if you're not even from there, but that stranger things have happened", probably.'

'Mm. What if I told you that I was stranded here, cut off from my home, my people?'

She considered. 'I'd say, "that's a pretty melodramatic way of looking at this job, even if the hours are long and the people are grouchy". At least we get invited to a lot of diplomatic buffets.'

'And if I asked you what your favourite flavour of ice cream was?'

'Chocolate,' she said, before shaking her head. 'No, vanilla.'

'Well, two out of three isn't bad.' He offered her one of his big, meaty hands to shake and grinned. 'You'll do. Congratulations, you start tomorrow.'

Well, Alyce thought as she left the office. *That could have gone worse.*

'Diplomacy,' announced the Doctor, 'is exactly like poker. Everyone in the room is pretending to have a stronger hand than they really do; it's just a case of working out who's bluffing.' He spread a sheath of papers out onto the desk before continuing. 'It follows, then, that nine-tenths of diplomacy is knowing how to conceal your true motives.'

Alyce thought about this for a few moments. 'You make it sound a bit sinister.'

'Do I?'

‘Like you’re working to a master plan,’ she said, nodding. She glanced over the documents. ‘What are we sorting out today?’

‘The Drahvin-Rill problem. Ever since that unfortunate business with the exploding planet, their governments aren’t feeling very talkative. Some of the Drahvin Cabal even want to use the situation as a prelude for invasion.’

‘Tricky.’

‘Mm,’ admitted the Doctor. ‘Of course, neither side expects to be dealing with an arbiter of my calibre. I’ve resolved more contentious situations in my sleep.’

Rolling her eyes, Alyce said, ‘Have you ever heard that expression that “pride comes before a fall”?’

‘It takes more than a fall or two to get rid of me,’ he murmured, collecting the papers back up and replacing them in the correct folder. ‘Do you think it’ll be a problem if I give the Rill the rights to mine in Galaxy Six?’

‘I don’t know. You’re the expert,’ she deadpanned. ‘I’m just the plucky diplomatic attache who stands around in pretty cocktail dresses. It’s a hard life, but I make do.’

The Doctor reached into his pocket and retrieved a coin. He flipped it absentmindedly into the air where it reached its apogee before tumbling back down. It landed neatly on the back of his hand. Seemingly satisfied by the result, the Doctor shoved the coin back into his pocket and said, ‘I think I might offer them those mineral rights. What’s the worst that can happen?’

‘Intergalactic war, riots, diplomatic ties being severed, everyone ending up in a really foul mood,’ suggested Alyce, counting off the possible outcomes on her long fingers.

Slouching back into his chair, the Doctor considered her words. ‘But,’ he countered, ‘if the Rill Collective use those minerals for medical applications—something that the Drahvins would never do, incidentally—we might see a marked decrease in the cases of space plague across the Twelve Galaxies. Even if everything does go a bit pear-shaped along the way, the potential rewards make it all so worthwhile.’

‘The ends justify the means?’

‘Well, don’t they in this case?’ The Doctor checked his chronometer and screwed up his face. ‘I should have met with the Rill delegation fifteen minutes ago. They’ll be wondering why no one bothered to meet them at the docking ring. Probably squelching around like a load of lost tourists.’

Alyce stood watching for a few moments as the Doctor left to retrieve the lost negotiating team. Then she took a deep breath, sat down at her compu-desk, and began to type. Those internal trade memos weren't going to write themselves.

Laaga stormed into the office like a bat out of hell, not even bothering to knock. Alyce thought that was pretty rude of the Drahvin diplomat, and decided to ignore the intruder until politeness dictated that she get involved.

Laaga was brandishing a datapad above her head like a shuriken. 'I wish,' she hissed, 'to speak to the Earth Representative.'

Not looking up, Alyce said, 'He's out at the moment. I could book you an appointment, if you'll tell me when you're free—'

'Unacceptable! We selected the Doctor to work as a *neutral* arbiter. It is clear that he favours the Rill agenda. This blatant assault on our interest will not be allowed to continue.'

Alyce sighed. 'If you feel that there's any problem, please feel free to fill out one of these complaint forms...' Hiding behind bureaucracy was hardly the bravest course of action, but she knew that discretion was sometimes the better part of valour. 'I'll have your concerns sent to the relevant department in Earth Sector.'

'But—'

'Will there be anything else?' asked Alyce sweetly, forcing a grin.

Laaga threw up her arms and stormed out of the office, leaving Alyce alone for a few moments. Then she became aware of the unmistakable sound of the Doctor's tuneless whistling coming down the corridor, and knew that he couldn't be far behind. Sure enough, his large form appeared in the door.

'Bad day?' she asked conversationally, surprised when he shook his head.

'Not at all!' he said, bounding up to his compu-desk. 'Everything is turning out exactly as I expected. If the problem isn't resolved to everyone's liking in the next few days, I'll eat my hat.'

'The Drahvins don't seem pleased,' Alyce said, recounting her earlier confrontation with Laaga. She glanced at the Doctor once she'd finished, expecting to see concern etched across his features. Nothing.

The Doctor shrugged. 'She's just jealous that her poker face isn't as good as mine.'

'And if she tells her government that the only way forward is to declare war against the universe?' demanded Alyce, swivelling her chair to face him. 'The Drahvins might look like a load of unemployed ex-glamour models, but I wouldn't want to get into a fight with them. People might die, and it'd be our fault.'

Steepling his fingers, the Doctor said, 'Do you know what the trolley problem is?'

Alyce stared at him blankly. 'What?'

'There's a train coming down the tracks, and it's about to reach a junction,' he explained. 'The problem is that each of the two tracks it might travel down have people tied to the rails. Track A has five people tied to the rails, and the train is currently heading towards them; Track B has one person tied to the rails.'

'Sounds like a recipe for a vehicular homicide. Why can't the trolley just stop before it hits anyone?'

'Because that would be cheating,' he said. 'Now, imagine you can see all of this happening. You're standing next to lever that will change the course of the train. If you want, you can have it run over just one person instead of five.'

'Right,' said Alyce, not really seeing how any of this was relevant.

'Do you pull the lever?'

'I don't know,' she said. She paused, considered. 'Yeah, I guess I would.'

'Why?'

'Because you're saving the greatest number of people. Sure, it sucks for the guy who gets run over, but for everyone else the situation is pretty peachy.' She studied his reaction, wondering if she'd said something wrong. 'Of course,' she hazarded, 'the best solution would be to derail the trolley completely, stop it before it hurt anyone at all. That would be even better.'

'Yes,' the Doctor admitted. 'If only the universe really worked that way. But,' he added softly, 'it doesn't, does it?'

Looking back, Alyce knew that the Doctor had been right. The Drahvins had flared up very briefly, launched attacks on a few frontier outposts, but once the Doctor had managed to talk some sense into Laaga, things had calmed down. The Rill Collective

was already reaping the fruits of the Doctor's diplomacy. Their newfound access to the minerals in Galaxy Six had already stimulated an economic boom. After some prodding from the Doctor, the Rill had even been convinced to loan some of their newfound wealth to the Drahvins, who accepted the aid graciously. Everyone had ended up happy. More or less.

It wasn't just the Drahvins and Rill who were benefitting from the Doctor's help. He'd become quite a celebrity in the months since his arrival. It seemed to Alyce that every race on Peacekeeper wanted to make appointments to see the Earth ambassador. His record spoke for itself: delegates from Malpha and Gearon were forging new alliances with their fellow Outer Galaxy powers; the residents of Cygnus Alpha and Frontios were communicating again after decades of silence; the Visians and Refusians had been able to build on their common traits. Even the Fengeth—a race normally opposed to any kind of diplomatic discourse—had congratulated the Doctor for his work and made moves to normalise relations with their peers in Galaxy Eight.

And yet Alyce could tell that, despite his successes, the Doctor was unhappy. His honeymoon period as warrior of diplomacy had come to an end, Alyce suspected. The reality of his work was beginning to take its toll.

'What's wrong?' she asked, after a particularly long day around the negotiating table. 'You can tell me, you know. We're friends.'

He shook his head slowly. 'You wouldn't understand,' he said. 'You wouldn't understand at all. It's all well and good for you to sit around and play at *Babylon 5*, but I was meant for something more than this.'

'Try me.' She watched as he slouched deeper and deeper and deeper into his chair. It was as though he was trying to disappear like a chameleon. But Alyce wasn't going to let him off that easily. 'Oh, come on. I know that there's something going on. You're not doing a very good job of pretending that there isn't, so why don't you just come out and tell me?'

He jerked his eyes towards her and stood up. 'Alright. Come here.'

Warily, Alyce shuffled her way past ormolu clocks and busts of long dead historical figures. She narrowly avoided knocking down a precariously positioned sculpture, but made it to the Doctor's side with the room—and herself—more or less in one piece.

'Well,' she asked, 'what is it?'

His hands shot out towards her and she flinched away, but he was too fast. A moment later, his fingertips were brushing against her temples. She felt spaced out, like she'd had a glass too many of an alien brew. Hazily, she heard the Doctor murmur something which sounded, through the fog in her mind, like, 'Contact.'

Deliriously, her mind touched his and she began to see.

There's something tumbling through the butterfly coloured vortex and its blue and rectangular and the light on top is flashing like an epileptic traffic light and inside the shape—the Ship—there's another something but this something has arms and legs and the inclination to make itself look like a human being for reasons unknown not that it always succeeds if you look out of the corner of your eye at just the right moment then you might see what this something is really like but let's assume that you're looking at it straight on it's just a person, no it's a woman, and she's got this short hair, it's cropped closely and greying a little around the roots but you get the impression that it's not real, but then what about this something is all that you really know for certain—who are you, and what are you doing inside my head, get out—is that this something calls itself the Doctor for reasons best known to itself and eats up monsters for a living like something out of a storybook she's manipulating the controls of the tumbling blue rectangle and trying to make it obey her but the thing has a mind of its own, has always had a mind of its own, but she doesn't mind, not knowing where you're going is part of the fun, unless you're going where she is about to and then there's nothing but regret but she doesn't know that yet, the worst thing about being in someone's head is that everything is all kinds of non-linear and it runs around like a stream of consciousness ouroboros and it's a bitch to make head or tail of but forget about that because the Doctor is about to arrive in the place that's going to eat her up for a change, because for every something in the universe there's always something bigger further up the food chain and right now the Doctor is small fry, just a little mid-morning snack for the thing called the Suutei which eats good intentions it extends into several dimensions it's got tendrils that snake through the vortex and it's caught the Doctor's scent and it's biting down on her ship and the ship crosses back into real space a moment too late it's caught between the here and the not-here and it's bleeding out and try as she might the Doctor can't fix things her ship—her TARDIS—is dying, savaged by the mass of nothing called the Suutei and the Doctor is panicking and fleeing leaving the ruins of her home behind as they extrude in and out of space-time like a non-euclidian cactus shaped explosion built out of solid maths it's trapped inside the thing called the Suutei like a thorn but it's not just the ship that's been rended it's the Doctor too and even now the process is beginning the process is called regeneration and it's life from death and even as she moves to safety

ejecting herself from her crumbling ship and falling through the vortex unprotected she's changing every cell in her body is becoming different and then it's all black and deep and dark and inky and when she wakes up she's somebody else and somewhere else a hundred light year away from where she died and she looks down at herself and thinks how strange it is to be a man again and then the mind image collapses and—

Alyce's nose was running. 'Um,' she said, 'I think I need to lie down.'

The Doctor was cradling his own head. 'That's the trouble with too much exposition; it's a headache for all involved.'

'You're telling me.' Alyce winced. 'What was that thing, that...' She struggled to pronounce the word she's seen in the Doctor's mind. 'That... Suutei thing, what was it?'

'Fleshy entropy.'

She shot him a withering stare. 'You're gonna have to give me a bit more than that, Doctor.'

'Things fall apart,' the Doctor began, 'and systems tend towards chaos. The Suutei is a catalyst for the entropic process. It exaggerates the decay taking place around it, makes things fall apart a little sooner and a little more dangerously. It's an absence. It got my scent, tried to make me fall apart too. It can't have known that I was able to regenerate. It's...' He trailed off.

'Bad news?'

'Worse,' said the Doctor. 'It's had a taste of me and it'll want to finish the job. It's coming here.'

Alyce gulped cartoonishly.

'Well?' Alyce demanded. 'Is that it? Are we just meant to sit here until we get eaten by a big load of nothing?' She was pacing around the room, back and forth, trying to make sense of everything that she's just seen and heard. Jerking around to look at the Doctor she said, 'Well, can't you do anything?'

'It depends,' he said, a little sheepishly.

Alyce rolled her eyes. 'What's that supposed to mean?' A new panic hit her. 'How long do we have,' she asked, 'until this thing gets here? How long before Peacekeeper falls apart?'

'About a month.'

'We've got to get away from here.'

The Doctor shook his head. 'No no no. This is a wonderful opportunity.'

'To get eaten, you mean.'

Another shake of the head. 'My TARDIS will still be embedded in the part of the Suutei that extends into this dimension,' he explained. 'That means that the closer that it gets, the closer I am to reclaiming my ship and getting out of here.'

Alyce scoffed. 'Fat lot of good that's going to do the rest of us.'

'You might have noticed that, since my arrival here, I've managed to make some friends,' the Doctor said. 'The role of the Earth ambassador was more or less forced upon me after a misunderstanding at customs, but I've been able to use it to my advantage. Earth's relations with the rest of the Twelve Galaxies have never been better.'

He was right, Alyce knew, but she didn't understand what he was getting at. He'd helped three dozen different races get what they wanted at one time or another since his arrival, but...

Then it dawned on her. 'They owe you,' she breathed.

He tapped the side of his large nose. 'Exactly.' Sitting back down behind his compu-desk, he said, 'Schedule a meeting with all of the alien delegates aboard Peacekeeper. It's time to call in some favours.'

Delegate Laaga was furious. Not only had the Doctor had the audacity to side against her government in the recent Drahvin-Rill treaty negotiations, but now he was requesting—no, *demanding*—her presence at a last minute summit. In the middle of the night, no less.

Groggily, she pulled herself up from her restslab and began to dress. She completed the task in less than a minute, with the military precision that had made the Drahvins a

respected force across the Twelve Galaxies. Taking one last glance in the mirror, Laaga set off towards the station's largest conference room.

By the time she arrived, the room was full to bursting with alien delegates. Laaga sat down, squeezing herself between a willowy Pel and an irate Gubble Cone, before turning her attention to the centre of the room.

The Doctor was pacing backwards and forwards, shadowed by his irritatingly useless attache. Laaga fixed the pair of them with an icy glare and adjusted her personal translator. A moment later, the Doctor's words—reconfigured into the Drahvin mother tongue—filled her mind like a supersonic boom.

'Fellow delegates,' he began, 'I've called you all here today to discuss an urgent problem.' He gestured to his companion; she began to hand around sheets of paper to the assembled aliens. When Laaga received her briefing, she stared at it in disbelief, barely listening to what the Doctor was saying.

He continued, 'Something is coming to this station. Something big and angry and terrifying; something that will eat us all up if we don't do anything about it.'

Laaga slammed a perfectly manicured fist down onto the conference table, drawing anxious glances from her nearby colleagues. 'This is madness,' she seethed. 'The Earth delegate would have us believe that we have no choice but to help him in his personal crusade against this lifeform; such a request is expressly prohibited by diplomatic regulations. He has done nothing to help the Drahvins, yet demands that we drop everything to assist him. We demand his immediate expulsion from this station.'

'Is that the royal we?' asked the Doctor. Laaga scowled at him.

'Unless the Drahvin government receives absolute proof of this entity's existence and confirmation of its hostile intentions,' Laaga announced, 'we refuse to provide any assistance, military or otherwise, to the Doctor. It is my sincere hope...' She surveyed the assembled delegates, her eyes full of imploring ice. 'It is my sincere hope that the other members of this advisory council pursue a similar course of action.'

With a flick of her long, plastic cloak, Laaga stormed out of the conference room, ignoring the glares of the Doctor's aide.

Well, thought Alyce as she watched Laaga vanish down the corridor, that was hardly the most auspicious start to the day.

The Doctor called for order, silencing the murmuring of the delegates. 'Whether you agree with Laaga or not,' he said, 'the threat remains. The Suutei entity will reach Peacekeeper in less than one standard cycle. If we work together, we might be able to assemble a force capable of repelling it by then. We might stand a chance.'

'I'm asking each of you to make a portion of your fleets available for the defence of this station. Nothing too much. A cruiser or two, a wing of fighters; every little helps.'

The Aridian delegate raised a silvery limb. 'This station/habitat was designed/constructed/intended to keep/maintain the peace/serenity,' he warbled through his translator unit. 'Your demands/requests are not peaceful/are violent in nature/substance. They contravene/go against the spirit/principles of this station/habitat. Explain/elucidate.'

'It's not a question of ethics,' pleaded the Doctor. Alyce noted that he looked very tired. 'None of us will be able to forge any kind of peace if we've been disassembled by the Suutei entity. The fleet might seem like a betrayal of our principles, but it's for the greater good. You'll thank me afterwards.'

The greater good, thought Alyce. That doesn't sound slightly megalomaniacal.

'We don't have long,' the Doctor continued. 'Let me help all of you. If we don't do something, you'll all be dead before you know it. Three weeks. A month at best.'

Alyce jerked to attention as an alarm began to blare out across the conference room. It was the proximity alert. That meant that something had dropped out of hyperspace right on top of the station. That meant...

She looked to the Doctor for confirmation of her fears.

'Then again,' he murmured sheepishly, not meeting her gaze, 'I could have miscalculated just how long it'd take to get here.'

Peacekeeper shook as the Suutei began its assault.

The few ships stationed around Peacekeeper were doing their best to repel the attack, but Alyce knew that it was a lost cause. As she pushed and shoved her way through the throng of delegates in the direction of the escape shuttles, she began to wonder if the Doctor's plans would ever have really worked out. Sure, he could make big speeches about unifying the alien worlds into a fighting force, but it would never have happened.

In the end, the outcome—being eaten by a terrible cosmic horror—would have been the same. They might have just survived a little longer.

She'd lost sight of the Doctor early on. Within seconds of the Suutei's appearance he'd left the conference room. Alyce had hoped that he was just stepping out to collect his ace in the hole, to recover the hidden trick up his sleeve that would repel the entity's attack. When he hadn't returned, she and the other delegates had decided to run for it. He'd probably done the same thing, just sooner than the rest of them. She could hardly blame him.

The station continued to shudder. Alyce visualized sections of the outer hull disintegrating like tissue paper in a rainstorm. She knew that, given time, the emergency force-fields designed to prevent air loss would fail. If the Suutei entity didn't get to her, the lack of atmosphere would do the job just as well.

It seemed to Alyce like things were going to get a whole lot worse before they got any better.

The Doctor forced his way through a tidal wave of limbs, tentacles, and eyestalks. Pausing behind a service duct, he yanked away the grille. He crawled inside, heading in the direction of Peacekeeper's Command and Control centre.

He liked ventilation shafts. Wherever he went in the universe, whatever face he wore or enemy he faced, the humble ventilation shaft was always there to get him from A to B. Service ducts were his oldest and most constant friends.

Minutes later, the Doctor arrived in Control. Ignoring the dozen or more bemused looks from the staff, he picked himself up from the floor and moved over to a console. As his fingers jumped over the touchscreen with hummingbird swiftness, an image began to form on the main viewer.

The Suutei had already consumed almost a quarter of the Peacekeeper station. The Doctor scanned the entity for weak spots, running checks and analyses; they all came up blank. Unless the occupants of the orbiter got hold of some hefty firepower, and soon, they would all be consumed.

He ran another scan of the entity, only to find that his console was being redirected. He turned to demand an explanation from a nearby TechOP.

'We don't know,' came the reply. 'It's as if someone is trying to communicate with us on all frequencies. The whole system is jamming up.'

The Doctor's mind raced. Could the Suutei be attempting to communicate, trying to issue an ultimatum? He hadn't thought it capable. But if he could bargain with it, convince it that there was another way...

His thoughts were interrupted by the shrill voice of Laaga. 'This is Intendant Laaga, of the Drahvin Fifth Defence Fleet,' she announced over the crackling com. 'Even as I speak, my forces are beginning their attack runs on the hostile creature.' A sheepish pause. 'Although we may not be able to destroy it, our actions should provide a chance for the rest of the station's populace to get away.'

'You came back, then,' said the Doctor, opening a channel of his own to the Drahvin flagship. 'I didn't think you cared.'

'I am now convinced of the severity of the situation.'

'And you just happened to have a fleet standing by in hyperspace?' prodded the Doctor. 'That's a bit convenient, isn't it? Were they lost?'

He could see Laaga tense up, so he killed the channel. He'd always suspected that the Drahvins kept a battle ready fleet in the vicinity, just in case they didn't get their way. Still, he could hardly complain. Laaga's duplicity might turn out to be Peacekeeper's salvation.

The station shuddered again, lights flickering, as the Drahvin cruisers began to bombard the Suutei. The Drahvin gunners were clearly enjoying their work, if the regularity of the blasts was anything to go by.

Warmongering races: difficult to deal with, but good in a pinch, considered the Doctor. But he had his own work to do.

Alyce grabbed the nearest environmental suit and donned it frantically. The shuttle bays were overflowing with refugees. She wouldn't be able to find a free seat on an escape shuttle even if she sold her soul to get one. She looked desperately around for some kind of salvation. Nothing presented itself.

It was at that moment that the shuttle bay was torn open by the Suutei.

Alyce turned head over heels as the bay depressurised, hurling her nearer and nearer to the maw of the attacking creature. Up close, she could see that the Suutei's inky

black carapace was shot through with veins of glowing rainbow, like a cave wall containing an outcrop of a rare mineral.

She was seconds away from it now. Her pitiful attempts to struggle against the void, to swim away, were pointless. Alyce swore and wished that she'd bothered to pick up a rocket pack.

Five.

She waved her arms like a flightless bird, trying to redirect her course.

Four.

She thought about all the things that she'd never get a chance to do.

Three.

She thought about all the things she'd regretted doing.

Two.

She swore again, directing her anger at the Mars University lecturer who'd got her this stupid, death wish of a job in the first place.

One.

She wondered if screaming would be too cliché.

Zero.

Alyce Sinclair slammed into the surface of the Suutei entity with a bone-crunching clunk and everything went black.

The Doctor hovered above the beetle-black carapace of the Suutei, making sure to suppress his biological rhythms. It wouldn't do to get detected and eaten now, not so close to the end. Not when he was so close to achieving his goal. The entity was gluttoned, tired after consuming such a huge meal, but he was taking no chances.

Beneath him, Peacekeeper was in disarray. The last of the escape shuttles had departed, leaving the empty shell of the gutted station floating in the void like a crushed up soda can. The remains of the Drahvin fleet had retreated back into hyperspace; the

surrounding area was littered with fragments of the gunships that had not survived the engagement.

Inside the EVA suit, the Doctor's face cracked into a sad frown. It hadn't always been like this, had it? There'd been a time—long ago now, but he was sure that it had happened once—when he'd been an adventurer. Not a hero. Not a scientific advisor. Not a university lecturer. Not a diplomat. An adventurer. Always moving on. Always somewhere new. No time to think about the carnage that he left behind.

He caught a glimmer of blue in the darkness and moved in closer to investigate.

Being stuck in one place, pencil pushing, filling out forms, made the deaths seem more real, more damaging. It wasn't worth it. He was supposed to be everywhere at once, helping to further a revolution on one world just as he was averting a war on another. That was the efficient route to saving the universe. That was the way that made all the deaths along the way seem worthwhile. A cause worth dying for. Not signing diplomatic charters and holding meetings. It was enough to drive a Time Lord insane.

The blue smudge reformed into a blue rectangle and then into the unmistakable shape of his TARDIS. The old girl was battered and leaking temporal radiation. The energies made his teeth itch. But she was here.

He was coming home.

And, floating nearby, was the unconscious body of Alyce Sinclair. Gathering her limp form up in his encounter-suited arms, he opened the doors to his Ship and, at long last, went inside.

Alyce awoke in a room that was probably impossibly large. Either that, or the concussion was worse than she'd assumed.

She opened her bleary eyes, felt for the flabby folds of her EVA suit and found that it was gone. She was lying on her back on a low couch. A fireplace was crackling several feet away; the wooden floor was covered in mismatching rugs; the air was filled with a low, almost organic hum. Out of the corner of her eye, Alyce could make out a large, glowing column which mushroomed out into a circular console. Maybe this was what happened when you died. Maybe this what the insides of the Suutei looked like.

'Welcome,' boomed the voice of the Doctor, 'to my TARDIS.'

Then again, maybe not.

Her head still aching, Alyce propped herself out and directed her gaze towards the Doctor's voice. He was perched on one side of a pile of objects—Alyce realised a moment later that they were the things from his office on Peacekeeper: sculptures, paintings, and the ormolu clock—and staring back at her.

'Well,' he began, getting up from the pile and padding towards her, 'what do you think? It's not exactly state of the art as time machines go, but it's homely. The scanner can pick up missing episodes of just about every forgotten television show you've never heard of. The tea is good; the gardens are better. And that's before you get to see the rest of the universe. Planets with eight suns; real actual mermaids who talk in prose poetry; the satisfying taste of a greasy spoon breakfast after foiling another Trod invasion. The—'

'You're mad.' Blunt as a shovel.

He grinned. 'Of course I am.'

'No, I mean, you're really properly mad.' Alyce slid her feet onto the nearest rug and stumbled towards him. Her voice developed an accusatory edge. 'Really, madly *pathological*. This has all be a game to you, hasn't it?'

He frowned. 'Mm... I...'

'People died out there,' she continued. 'But that's okay for you, wasn't it? Just collateral damage so that you could get this place back and go off adventuring. So you could go and save everywhere else.'

'An ethical conundrum. Your own personal trolley problem. The universe—all of the problems that need solving out in time and space—were tied to Track A. Peacekeeper was the single person tied to Track B. The Suutei was the trolley, and you were the bugger pulling the lever.'

'Well, you know what? Well played. You did it. For the greater good.'

The Doctor's voice had reduced to a low murmur. 'Alyce, you have to understand that—'

She gave a harsh laugh. 'Understand what, that the end justifies the means? That you're going to be able to do more good out there, that you can find a way to tip the scales in favour of good rather than evil?'

'Something like that.' A sheepish pause. 'I don't suppose you're going to sign up for the no questions asked tour of time and space, then?'

Alyce shook her head. 'I don't think so.'

'I'm sorry to hear that.'

'I bet,' she said, heading for the door. 'I hope it was worth it.'

With that, she was gone.

The Doctor stood in silence for a few moments. Then he crossed over to the console and began to manipulate the craft's controls.

A moment later, the Ship was elsewhere.

He sat down on the couch, pushing Alyce's discarded spacesuit onto the panelled floor. 'I've made mistakes,' he announced, to his TARDIS as much as to himself. 'I've led innocent people to their deaths. I've let my friendships... die out.' He glanced down at the EVA suit, limp and empty and lifeless. 'But I'm free. Free to help where help is needed. Free to save the universe, once again. Just you and me, old girl. You, me, and the greater good. Angst-free adventure.' He patted the TARDIS' wall affectionately.

'And it was worth it.'

A heavy, pregnant pause.

'It was worth it.'

Again, like repetition made the words come truer.

'It. Was. *Worth*. It.'

Simple Things

by The Oncoming Storm

What if Letitia Wright was the Doctor and encountered that famed Australian culinary critic Greg?

“Hi everyone, Greg here, now today I’m going to Burger World to try out new Double Bacon Burger! I’m very excited, you know, being a bacon lover myself, I just thought, mate, how can I miss that?”

Greg was driving to the new Burger World restaurant, filming. A routine thing, really. How many of those did he film already? Oh, dozens. But he just doesn’t get tired. Especially if that’s a bacon day! Oh, you could feel pure excitement just by looking on his face. Bacon day! Crunchy, tasty bacon burger! What a treat! What could possibly ruin such an amazing day?

“Greg, don’t eat the Double Bacon Burger! It’s a lure!” – a random energetic voice from the backseat warned.

Greg, shocked, tried his best not to lose control of the car and looked back at the backseats. Nobody there. He parked on the side of the road and checked again. Nobody! Not a sign of anything. Then he remembered that camera was still working.

“Mate, I think I just recorded a real paranormal activity! Awesome!” – said Greg to his viewers. Greg always tried to behave like a nice lad on camera even when bizarre things happen. And this could be a hit for his channel. A ghost, in his car? Telling him not to eat a burger? He checked again for hidden loudspeakers, but everything was untouched.

Greg stopped recording and skimmed through the video. And he was right, he wasn’t crazy! For a brief moment there was a black woman. At her twenties, fluffy hair, skinny, green jacket. She was there just for a second, as if she was there just to say him this. But how?? What??

Despite all of this, Greg decided to finish his friday review. As he arrived to the restaurant, a number of new odd developments occurred. Firstly, everyone at the restaurant seemed emotionless. People were still talking to each other, checking

phones and stuff, but it all felt like it was set up, like if a bad director was shooting a scene about people at the restaurant, but he had no idea how to make it feel believable. Secondly, one of the cashiers was oddly short, had weird teeth and pebbly orange skin. "Poor lad," – thought Greg.

Greg ordered the Double Bacon Burger and set up a camera again, ready to record his review. He was so excited to finally taste it that he forgot (or ignored) all the weird stuff that happened to him today. He almost took a bite when he remembered the warning of that ghost woman in his car. The Double Bacon Burger looked really appealing and Greg almost couldn't resist. The decision of the lifetime. "No." – said Greg – "I'll pass."

POOF!

All other visitors disappeared in a second. Suddenly he was alone in the empty restaurant. Greg looked down on a Double Bacon Burger and it was gone too. Instead, there was a gross green thing on a tray. Almost looking like a brain. A green disgusting brain he was about to eat.

"What the hell, mate?" – Greg exclaimed.

The next moment a lightning struck in the middle of the room and a tall hooded figure appeared. It could pass a human except for its face – horrendous featureless face, no eyes, no nose, nothing except for a mouth full of sharp teeth. It was him against Greg that moment. Or not, it was even worse: the cashier was still present, he was just left unnoticed. Without the hat you could see three tentacles growing on his head.

Never seen alien life before. Never seen anything like that. And now, everything is so wrong. Waking up in the morning, he didn't expect anything to go wrong. In fact, it started as one of the nicer days.

"You... How did you resist?" – the tall creature asked.

Greg looked around, seeking help. He glanced at the window – There was that woman! She's right there, outside. And she was shushing him, trying to prevent him from revealing her presence.

"Talk to me... Human." – irritated creature demanded.

"Huh, well, mate, I don't think I can help you."

“You will taste the gift. I made it for you.”

“You what? Look, I’m not eating that, mate!”

Greg nervously looked in the window again – his ghost guest from this morning was pointing a stick with a purple light at some object, which looked like a small metal disk. High-tech tinkering?

“You will pay for this, Greg. Graske, destroy him!” – ordered the creature.

“With pleasure, Master.” – responded the short fellow.

Greg was starting to get really nervous. Another glance at the direction where the woman stood – aaand she’s gone, again! Except in a second she appeared again.

Meanwhile Graske pulled out a futuristic blaster from somewhere.

“Oh shit, mate!” – swore Greg, trying to dodge the upcoming shots by running from table to table.

THE GLASS BROKE. The woman got in.

“Sorry, had to make sure everything is right first.” – she said.

She pointed her little stick at the Graske’s gun and did the wheezing – the gun became malfunctioning.

“I projected the image of myself into your past so you do the right choice. And you did! That’s great. Now, you.” – she looked at the creature – “Leave or It’ll be your last day.”

“How? How did you survive... again?”

“You used to have much better plans before, how far you’ve fallen, Trickster?”

“We’ll meet again, Doctor.” – said the creature and dispersed in the air. Graske activated his teleporter too, following him.

“Greg, you ok?”

Greg was nervously dialing someone.

“Greg, it’s fine, trust me. They are gone.” – said the Doctor thoughtfully.

“I’m trying to call Benny, if they got to her I wouldn’t forgive myself, god, I hope...”
The Benny? Nah, namesake.

“She’s fine, believe me. Trickster’s gone. You’re safe. We’re safe.”

“She’s not answering. God, who are you? What did you do in my car this morning? I must be mad, mate.”

“Trust me, she’s fine. When the core of Trickster’s plan fails all consequences are reversed. You are the hero! You didn’t eat that burger, and oh I know you wanted it.”

“You’re talking nonsense.”

“I know. I’d love to dump this boring piece of exposition where I explain who the Trickster and Graske are and how we were saved because of bootstrap paradox and what was that brainburger meant to do and how I know your name and...”

“I want to see Benny.”

“Sure. I can help with that! You see, I’m time traveler and...”

“I just want to make sure she’s ok”

“Okay, big guy.”

Greg didn’t really care about spacey stuff. Greg is a simple guy. He cares about youtube, tasty food, crunchy bacon, and, most importantly, about Benny.

The Doctor transported Greg back home with her TARDIS, and Benny indeed was fine. And Greg was happy because she was fine. Everything was fine. Even the Doctor, having spent a month in a post-apocalypse version of Earth where Greg ate the brain-burger and became the giant monstrous slave of the Trickster, was fine. Even the Trickster was fine, still being free and already crafting some another sinister plan.

What's next?

"Greg, Benny, want to come with me? You know, I'm time traveler after all, I can take you anywhere and..." – asked the Doctor.

"Alright, why not?" – Greg replied.

"Lovely!" – exclaimed the Doctor.

Greg was a simple man.

Counting Stars

by Nacho

What if Hugh Grant's Doctor from 'The Curse of Fatal Death' spoke his true feelings to his companion Emma?

"Have you ever counted them all?" asked Emma, her feet dangling out the doors of the TARDIS, staring out at the night sky. A breeze blew across her face, a small gust that made her eyes unconsciously squint a tiny bit. Parallel to the threshold was the night sky, as to someone standing firmly on terra firma it would have looked like an unmoving sideways police box hovering just barely in view.

Beside her, a tall, handsome man sat down smiling an awkward but confident grin. His clothes were the same ones his predecessors had worn as he hadn't the time to change them yet. "I've gone and worn the same clothes through three lifetimes; how very silly of me." he occasionally thought to himself.

The breeze blowing into the TARDIS was constant and mild; just enough to provoke some small, subtle movement in Emma's hair and gave her a slight chill. the Doctor's hair remained stiff as a board, perfect and unaffected. As Emma shifted over to the Doctor, he put his arm around her back, clutching her waist. He couldn't help but notice how warm she felt; how wonderful and lively she was with her heart beating out of her chest at his touch.

As the Doctor had fallen in love, there were certain things he had grown accustomed to that his previous lives would have balked at: glances, kissing, routines....

There was one thing that the Doctor would never get used to, one sensation that love could always surprise him with and make him feel like he was experiencing it anew: touch. Above all else, he loved the way love felt in his fingers.

Heartbeats, warmth, shivers... it was all so pleasant. You could feel someone trusting you with something greater than their lives. It was perhaps a higher science than anything that could be studied.

"No, I've made it a point to never count them all. For one thing, there's always new ones being made and dying than can be counted in time." he said.

That answer wasn't good enough for Emma, who looked up at him scrunching her face lightly. "Doctor, you've a time machine. You could count them all in the space of a moment without worry." she said teasing him.

The Doctor thought diplomatically about his answer before a nudge from Emma broke his concentration. It was a signal she had developed in their travels together that meant "Answer on instinct".

"Fine fine..." the Doctor said, waving his hand in the air as if wafting away a thought hanging in the air in front of him. He sighed. "I suppose if I counted them then I'd know, Emma. I'd know how many stars go out and go by because of some other reason than natural cause; I'd know how many stars sustain life and how many take it away; but most of all I'd just know how many stars there were: how small the universe really is to a man that can have eve...." his voice trailed off.

There was a slight sadness to that last part. Emma noticed it into the undertone, and subtly his fingers clutched around her side a little tighter. She rested her head against his shoulder and looked out. They both felt her heart beat slow, but pound more forcefully in preparation of her next statement.

"Would you prefer; no. Would you want... everything?"

"No I... I suppose I wouldn't want everything. Throughout my lives I've always been more of an 'I want anything' sort of person: knowledge, respect, unlimited rice pudding, friends, experience... that sort of thing."

He watched a comet go by. Normally that was a sign of an alien invasion. Tonight it was just a comet.

"Tonight... and maybe all the rest of my nights, I think I just... I want love."

He smiled before continuing, the audible smile that you can sort of just hear from someone's lips despite not making a sound.

"I don't even know what it wanting love means... what love means truly; but I think I have it."

She reached over now, satisfied. Her arms wrapped around him, his clothes as cold as the breeze and his chest stiffer and stronger than the man she had met when she fell in love with him. He was always the same person no matter the outward exterior; and the love she felt for him was the same love.

"I love you very much. And we all need you, and..." her voice trailed off with a strange, uncharacteristic desperation.

"What was that?" he said looking at her, confused.

"What are you talking about?" she said looking at him.

"I could have sworn you just said something." he said looking behind him into the TARDIS for the source of whatever the sound was.

"Are you alright? Maybe the wind whispering through the TARDIS is playing tricks on you?" said Emma smiling, teasing a little bit.

"Yes, of course. Stupid ass that I am; I should have realized." said the Doctor smiling and rationalizing it to himself.

Slowly he got up and walked towards the console, flipping a few switches mindlessly.

"Do you suppose there's some kind of a threshold for diminishing returns on Egyptian Cotton sheet softness? I mean, you have sheets where they start going up by the 100s, but then all of the sudden they go up by the 500s... I wonder if there's a difference by that point between a 2000 and a 2100 thread count?" said the Doctor as he twisted a few knobs to set a destination.

Emma came up behind him, embraced him and kissed his cheek while standing on her toes.

"I really don't think it matters, to be honest; as long as we can sleep on them." she said pulling the lever from behind him to close the TARDIS doors. "Where are we going, Doctor?" she asked.

"I've got to see someone on Te-" started the Doctor before being interrupted by Emma.

"Let's go to Barcelona! The planet!" said Emma smiling.

"What? But wh-" started the Doctor again.

"So I can adopt a dog with no nose." said Emma.

The Doctor stood dumbstruck. He couldn't remember having brought Emma to Barcelona. In fact, he was staunchly against a detour to Barcelona; but as he turned around to protest and looked into her pleading eyes he couldn't help but feel that resistance fade away.

Where did he need to go again?

Oh, that's right. Barcelona.

He pulled the switch to dematerialize, and the wheezing began.

"He was the best and bravest of all my fo-" said The Master from what seemed like everywhere.

"Say again?" said the Doctor, turning to look at Emma.

"Say what?" yelled Emma, yelling over the wheezing sound.

The Doctor pulled the fast cancel switch and paused, putting his hand in the air to stop Emma preemptively should she try to interrupt his concentration.

He was listening, his mind wracked with a sense of paranoia and confusion. The Master's voice always meant trouble; what could he be into this time? What possible problems would be around? Sometimes the Doctor just wished he could call up The Master and just say eno-

Emma kissed him passionately, running her fingers through his hair and across his back as she sync-ed his breathing to her own. As she brushed her fingers through and massaged at his scalp, he felt his hair down to the follicle snap back into place as soon as her touch was off them. Somehow the embrace, the closeness of her body felt even warmer against his.

He broke off the kiss and smiled. She smiled back and took him by the hand towards the TARDIS kitchens, where a fine table was set with candle light.

Instinctively he sped up and pulled out the chair for her before seating himself; before him a plate of gnocchi bolognese. He smiled, his elbow resting the table and his head resting on his hand above it.

There was something in her eyes he could get lost in forever. A simpler time, an acceptance; the search that he had been on for so long: to be home. And here it was inside Emma's heart.

"It's hard, you know... loving you. I'm always so scared of all the things you don't say. I've been here a long time and... I mean, invariably it's hard not to freak about some of the solutions you come up with. I know you try. You try so... so hard; but you watch a man who can take a hopeless situation surrounded by death and with a flick of a finger tear a thousand lives to shreds in an instant... whether it's days or weeks, sometimes watching it on a daily basis and it just changes everything. You go through stages of

relief, acceptance, unease and paranoia; wondering what else he's hiding from you, wondering if there's ever been a day when his morals didn't line up with yours... wondering if there ever was a day he made the wrong choice. Those types of moments, those thoughts and feelings are hard to get over." Emma paused and took a breath.

"And then you realize if he didn't love you, he wouldn't be able to make those choices."

The Doctor stood up, walked around the table to her and embraced her tight in his arms. He breathed a long, deep sigh and felt the emotional weight his life cast off his shoulders for a brief moment. He was so proud; proud of the person Emma was, proud that he lived up to her expectations and proud he could have the privilege of saving the entire galaxy 27 times.

But most of all he was proud that love could redeem him of all the terrible stains on his soul.

Emma sighed. "And that's why you need to come back now."

"What?"

"You need to come back and regenerate."

"What do you mean? I feel fine."

"I'll explain-"

"Later. Oh." the Doctor said looking down.

"He was never cruel and never cowardly, and it'll never be safe to be scared again." said Emma in reality, her voice echoing through the TARDIS interior.

"I think I'd like you to explain now, if you would." the Doctor said, a tear in his eye.

"We're inside here, giving you one last dream potentially. You could go off to sleep or you could come back again. Yes, I should think just this once you could come back again." said Emma.

"Can I take a moment to think about it?" he asked her.

"Take all the time you need. No one is in danger." she said.

The Doctor took her hand and walked her back to the TARDIS doors, pushing them open. Together they sat down with their feet dangling outside the threshold, looking at the stars again.

"It's beautiful. I've saved it so many times." said the Doctor, nostalgically cuddling up to Emma again.

"You've certainly put a lot of work into it. You could... look after it a little more." said Emma. She felt so warm now; the Doctor was sure he was close to final death. His body was getting heavy.

"Can't I rest here? Maybe... I don't know yet. I'm so tired Emma, and I tho-" the Doctor started. She put her finger on his lips to quiet him.

"Take all the time you need. We're not coming or going until you make a decision." said Emma, before she started humming You Are My Sunshine; her head on his shoulder.

"I've never counted the stars. Now I wish I had though. There is a few things I counted, though." said the Doctor, tearing up. The colors in his eyes were fading a bit.

"What did you count?" asked Emma, her voice sweet and inviting.

"I counted all the children I saved. I counted all the futures I created. I counted smiles and thank yous and hellos and goodbyes." he said. Emma picked her head up and kissed his cheek.

"Most of all, I counted how many times you told me that you loved me." said the Doctor.

"I know"

"I needed every single one of those to get me through... to get me here."

"I know"

"Do you know where I go from here?"

"...I.... No."

The Doctor paused to think.

"They'll get it all wrong without me." said the Doctor, whispering now as low as the breeze; so quiet that only Emma could hear him now.

"You shouldn't be the Doctor at all. You should be the Gardener." she said smiling.

He coughed. "Maybe if I come back, I'll call myself that."

"Maybe? Tell me something..." she said looking him in the eyes.

"What?" he asked, looking around, averting her gaze like a scared puppy.

“What would one more run around the treadmill hurt? Would it kill anyone if you took one more victory lap.” asked Emma.

“It would kill me.” said the Doctor, looking out into the sky.

“That’s alright, you never even had the time to get used to this face.” she said squeezing him tight one last time.

He had made his decision. It was finally time.

“Thank you, Emma. Everywhere else might have fallen, but... but you were here at the end. Where I go next... I hope we go together.” he said smiling.

The Doctor blinked, and a tear fell from his eyes. In the instant he blinked, he began to see through someone else’s eyes. The change had started.

“It’s impossible! Beyond all known laws of the universe.” exclaimed The Master.

“Maybe even the universe can’t bear to be without the Doctor.” said Emma, overjoyed.

A strange, outdated CG effect followed as the Doctor’s features changed, becoming softer; more feminine. It was as if she became a female. Because she had. Welcome back to the Moffat universe, folks.

The Doctor felt like a ton of bricks had been dropped firmly on her forehead from about 3 meters away. Her thoughts were a jumble of bees and unicorns, fluttering about.

“Okay, one thought at a time; don’t want to seem too random” she thought to herself.

Mentally, she surveyed her new body. Same thoughts? Yep. Same memories? Yep. Same hearts? Yep. New eyes, that’s a new one. And...

“Hang on,” she thought to herself, “Did I just do that whole sequence 3 times in under 20 minutes? What the fu-.”

She stood up and smiled; looking at Emma with fresh eyes. Time to be the Doctor again!

“Emma, look. I’ve got aetheric beam locators.”

Framing Story: Part 4

Reflected Glare

by Neo

“What did you think of those?” asked Jack. “I particularly liked the one with...”

Gwen shook her head as Jack went on to explain his favourite of the four tapes they’d watched. As he did so, she noticed he stepped on another tape by his feet.

“What’s gotten you all perked up then?” she asked. “You were mighty depressed by how wrong this all was before, now you seem positively thrilled by those different Doctors.”

Jack smiled distantly as he fiddled with a videotape in his hands, rubbing some sort of device against it.

“What are you doing then?”

“Making some adjustments.”

“Is that why you’re all chipper now?”

“Sure. That, and I remembered a thing or two, that’s all. Put things into perspective. What about you, Gwen? How are you feeling?”

“To be honest Jack, I’m having trouble concentrating - it’s so damn bright in here I could barely see the video at times, just this room. I know the fastest way out of this room is to watch the tapes, but how could you honestly enjoy them so much knowing one of our teammates is trapped, erased from our memories?”

“One?”

What did he mean by this? Of course it was one, that woman, Tosh Sato she’d called herself in that first message they’d seen here. Except...wasn’t there another?

She could dimly remember a man being taken by a shadow in the room, only...was it just a shadow? Who was the man?

“Two,” she said. “Jack, it was two, there was a man with us here and he was taken away too, but for the life of me I can’t remember who he was.”

"I figured as much."

"Then why didn't you do anything to help?"

"I didn't realise where exactly we were until now. Gwen, we need to know more about where we are. We should-"

"If 'we' need to know more, then why don't you just tell me what you've remembered already?"

"I will, don't worry, but first we need to watch these. Here, look."

Gwen walked over to him, where he was holding a crate of tapes.

"Look at the label on the side," he said. "Read it aloud."

"'Meta'?"

"Exactly. You wanna know more about where we are? Let's get meta."

"And you'll tell me what you know after we watch these ones then?"

"You have my word."

"Jack, how am I meant to concentrate on these tapes when you're holding that over me? Why can't you just tell me everything now?"

"Look, Gwen, I won't interrupt, okay? We'll watch all these tapes in a row. I'll let you settle down. Don't think about here, don't think about this room, let's just watch these tapes. The more tapes we watch, the closer we are to getting out of here."

"And that's supposed to make me want to watch them, is it?"

"Yes."

Gwen rolled her eyes but relented, sitting down as Jack popped the first tape from the crate into the player.

Foreman: The Return of The Doctor

by Nacho (Dark'ness Dementia Raven Way)

What if a Foreman story actually got released?

Author's Note: As a fanfiction on a fanfiction all I have to say is, "Special fangz (get it, coz Im goffik) 2 my gf (ew not in that way) Nilso." Please support the official release... someday.

The Doctor and Nirvi sat on a Central Park bench in New York City, June 1st, 1969. It was Nirvi's choice and The Doctor's mistake. She had wanted to see The Stonewall Riots, something she had a picturesque fantasy of in her mind for years.

A gay and open paradise, a brutal police lockdown and then... a heroic uprising that changed the world. If ever The Doctor was going to see humanity through the lens of Humans, it was at that moment she had decided.

There was in fact something quaint to Nirvi's idea; to her general disposition. Hundreds of years and quite a few lifetimes on Earth and yet somehow she expected to show him something that he had been to, that he had shaped. Or at least he probably had been in another timeline now gone by his own mucking about in Earth's timestream.

Now it was hard to keep an eye on where he had been and what exactly he had to avoid anymore, and he had decided it was probably best to adopt a recycling five year memory of time.

The way it worked was that if he could not remember going somewhere in the last five years then there was a very good chance that his personal mucking about with history had probably erased his involvement with an event. For the life of him The Doctor could not remember at all when he had decided to adopt it; the events that led to it were probably some dull revelation about trying to keep seeing the universe with eyes anew.

Still even with a five year rule, had been something nagging at his mind as he had input the coordinates; distracting him just enough to bring them to the beginning of the month instead of the proper destination. Something that subconsciously was telling him to run already, an urge he suppressed outwardly for his companion's sake.

Not willing to let that cautious feeling go to waste, The Doctor had instead decided to wait and enjoy a small vacation rather than fly his TARDIS headfirst into trouble for once.

"It's just a bit daft, innit?" Nirvi said to The Doctor, lost in his thoughts.

"What? What are you talking about?" said The Doctor.

"Well, the most important event of the next 30 years is about to happen and here they are worrying about who the new Rolling Stones guitar player is! Don't they know these old white guys will be making music for the next 5 decades?" she said visibly exasperated.

"No, I don't think they do Nirvi. It's only 1969 to these people, remember?" he said turning his head to look at her. Nirvi's expression turned indignant.

"I know that! There's no need to patronize me. I only mean to say that there's more important things that are happening and these people ought to get with the times." Nirvi said laying back in frustration and staring at the sky.

"You know what? You're right, Nirvi! Excuse me!" The Doctor said standing up.

The Doctor ran up enthusiastically to a tall, lanky white man in a turtleneck, jeans and a blazer walking by and grabbed him by the lapels while smiling.

"Excuse me sir! Do you know that you look like an idiot? You're wearing a sweater that shows beyond the boundaries of your blazer and it looks as unkempt and stupid as can be, and it must be an inferno under all that clothing- scratch that, it smells like an inferno under that clothing. Try some deodorant, man!" He said before ducking a hook punch by the man and pushing him to the ground while the man was off balance from his own assault. Nirvi burst out laughing at the childish, over-the-top display.

"I wonder where and when in the cosmos someone decided that the more articles of clothing you wear the more formal your attire is. Always the same no matter where you go: more elaboration, more fancy. Now that would make an interesting trip to find the root of, eh Nirvi?" he said as he grabbed Nirvi by the wrist and ran away from the spectacle he caused.

"Probably was decided on by a stuffy, over-privileged git if you ask me." Nirvi said as she ran, struggling to keep up with The Doctor's frantic pace.

Eventually they lost the man somewhere in the streets of Greenwich Village. There they sat at a bar called Julius and stopped for lunch. They sat themselves among the dull roar of the patrons, waiting for a server to come by. The Doctor had already decided on The Special, whatever that was today. Nirvi was rather more keen to see a menu.

Nirvi wondered for a moment about what Alex, her genderfluid ex-boyfriend would say if he could see her now; bravely standing atop the powder keg. Time and space and life and death and love and hate and all of the extremes of the universe were in her grasp; and it was breathtaking. Nirvi decided that if everyone in the world could experience what she had seen so far, everyone would see the nuances and all the grey areas that she had always known the universe had and harbored.

"You know, it's rather odd" said The Doctor as he looked around the room, his words snapping Nirvi from her trance.

"What, that we haven't seen a menu yet?" asked Nirvi with a smile like they were on the same wavelength..

"No." replied The Doctor

"That we're in a gay culture area and there's not a single person in drag?" asked Nirvi expectantly looking for affirmation on this theory.

"No, it's-" The Doctor started.

"That there's a shocking amount of conformity to the clothing worn by this so-called 'counterculture'?" asked Nirvi getting frustrated now.

"No, if y-" The Doctor started again.

"Jesus Christ, Doctor!" She exclaimed.

"Atheist." The Doctor reminded her like some kind of heavy handed skit that wasn't very funny.

"Then come out with it! Don't just sit there smug and condescending! Tell me already!" she said in full frustration.

"Look around, Nirvi. Drink in our surroundings. The entire room has the dull, white noise of conversation, but no one is moving at all. Not a single mouth or head." said The Doctor as he stared around the room in surprise.

"Y-yeah. I was about to say that." said Nirvi, slightly embarrassed and looking down.

"It's almost as if someone is piping in the white noise to hide something." The Doctor said standing up and waving a hand in front of a few faces.

Nirvi stood up and searched the room. She didn't bother checking the frozen people, or whatever they were. She was more interested in finding out where the noise was coming from; what it could be hiding.

Before she could find the source of the sound however, everything stopped at once and the roar tapered off into a distance. She looked at The Doctor and they both approached the door out with a powerful sense of caution in their steps. They looked at each other and gave a nod of approval before Nirvi flung the door open with authority, The Doctor immediately scanning the area with his sonic screwdriver for atmospheric conditions.

After half a second of analysis, the Doctor dropped his arms uselessly to his sides and slipped the Sonic screwdriver away in his pocket in one deft motion. Nirvi's eyes widened at the sight before her in awe.

"Welcome home, son." said The Doctor's Mother dressed in all white in a wicker wheelchair in front of a grand, decaying victorian-styled mansion and unkempt gardens as far as the eye could see all around it.

"Lungbarrow." The Doctor uttered before stepping through the doorway onto Gallifreyan soil.

"Oh. My God. I can't even-" Nirvi said at a loss for words.

"Atheist." The Doctor reminded her as if this running joke would end up getting funnier as they kept repeating it.

"Shut it, 'Time Lord'" said Nirvi.

"That's not really an insult on a planet full of Time Lords, Nirvi." Reminded the Doctor gently so as not to inflame her anger.

"Yeah well I-" started Nirvi before being cut off by The Doctor's Mother.

"Son, I think we ought to finish this conversation inside. We've much to talk about." she said with some authority as she turned the chair and wheeled herself back towards the door.

"Mother, forgive me but-" The Doctor started.

"You won't be staying. Yes I know, but you ought to have a conversation and a cup of tea while you're here." said The Doctor's Mother as she opened the front door to the foyer and wheeled herself inside.

The Doctor and Nirvi followed her inside hesitantly. An intricate, high ceiling with ornate gothic displays; the foyer was a grand piecemeal of what looked to be baroque era art with a slight twist: every costume was just a little off, a little alien to the sensibilities of the time. Nirvi had half a mind to suggest to The Doctor that his own family was to blame for the intricacies of dress and formality from what she saw.

There was something else about the pictures as well, something that creeped Nirvi out to no end. She couldn't quite put her finger on it, but it was as if there was something living inside the art; as if it could see her. Looking at his companion, the Doctor picked up on her unease.

"Marvellous, isn't it? Time Lord art seals a small piece of consciousness inside it so that if you're on the right psychic frequency, you'll be able to interact with them." The Doctor said pointing at a particular painting before them.

"And on the barest level there's just enough of a psychic connection that they can see you; that their eyes will follow you throughout the mansion." said The Doctor's Mother as she led them to a parlor to the side and gestured towards a couch.

Nirvi had quite a few questions about that art, who and what the depictions were of and such; but she saved her questions for later. Her mind was wandering and she had already missed a portion of the conversation in front of her.

"Mother, I know how you feel but it's all too raw still. There's so much to be done to 'fix' Gallifrey that I wouldn't know where to start; much less come across with the authority to actually make their ridiculous and pompous class-based society listen to me. No, I think it better that the Time Lords fix their own messes. I've already cleaned up mine from the war." said The Doctor calmly before taking a sip of tea.

"Son you 'are' a Time Lord, lest you forget. And I'm not even talking about staying permanently or fixing the planet; but at the very least fixing this house, healing this family." said his Mother in earnest and with a hint of compassion behind her stoic disposition.

"Well... It could use a bit of sprucing up. Look at the dates on all of the clocks; for Time Lords you certainly don't keep them calibrated well at all. They're practically off by 8 years! Incredible!" The Doctor said as he marvelled about looking around the room.

The Doctor's Mother's eyebrows raised. Nirvi read her face as conveying some sort of annoyance at The Doctor's quip. "Son, do you remember the last time you were here?" she said staring intensely at him despite his lack of focus on her.

“Yes, how could I forget seeing my granddaughter being dragged away to prison. Seeing my home torn to pieces and running away disgraced.” He said before his eyes finally caught her gaze and his expression froze.

“No Son, there’s another visit. 3 years you spent after a distress signal I sent out about a potential time sickness that inhibited my regenerations and could have proven fatal. Have you honestly forgotten so easily?” said The Doctor’s Mother, her authoritative gaze now conveying a sense of tension that spread around the room like ice.

The Doctor looked down, his mind concentrating. Something was there that he could not directly see; as if there was a sort of mental perception filter and his mind was deliberately avoiding the memory, looking just off to the side. Was it perhaps so mundane a visit that he had just purged the event to keep more interesting memories available? Was it something secret he was keeping from himself; something dangerous or something perhaps distressing? Terror was seeping into The Doctor’s character, the existence of a secret he kept from even himself was a staggering sort of blow to his psyche that put the brakes on his leaving immediately.

Nirvi sat in disbelief. One the one hand, how well do you really know someone; but on the other? The Doctor having a mother and an estate and having grown up in a weird place where the pictures stare at you and the clocks were wrong and WHOA there’s a 3 year gap in his memory and...why? Why to all of this? Why did Time Lords have victorian style houses and why were they even here and how did they even get here and...

Spinning with questions, her mind and sight began to feel dizzy. Grabbing a cup of tea for herself, she grappled with everything going on in her mind without any sense of grounding before taking a sip hoping that it was going to lead to some sort of epiphany that straightened everything into a nice, compartmentalized bubble that she could safely tuck away as another aspect of her fantastic life to recall at her leisure.

“You really shouldn’t have even called him here, mum” called a figure from the doorway walking in with sandwiches and a small syringe on a fine silver platter, casually dressed in earth attire not far removed from Nirvi’s, if without the branding attached.

“Ohiya! Good to see you. I hope your family is well.” The Doctor said as he turned on a dime and rose to greet her. Giving her a hug, the Doctor turned to Nirvi and gestured over to her for a formal introduction.

“Nirvi, this is Ohiya, a friend of the family and the sister of my old friend Koschei. Ohiya, this is Nirvi, my current travelling companion.” said The Doctor gesturing one to the other.

“Charmed.” said Ohiya with a strange sense of cold detachment, extending her hand in greeting. Nirvi shook it with a nod and went back to her seat wondering if she had offended Ohiya. The Doctor recognized the response immediately, the sort of stuffy classism that kept the Time Lords on their own pedestal and in their own decadence. If only Ohiya had learned a small measure of the humility her brother secretly harbored; but then again the chance that she might learn some of his madness in the process wasn’t something The Doctor hoped to explore.

Ohiya, it turns out was the family nursemaid; having learned it in a boarding school during the War in Heaven; a school for boring professions no one really cares about because none of you readers are stuffy upper class time lords. C’mon guys. It’s a Foreman fanfiction. It was inevitable at some point I was going to stop giving a shit about something and we’re well past any quality expectation you expect from the actual Foreman production. Za is no leader.

The Doctor was lost in a memory or two for a moment of Ohiya hiding in the bushes as Koschei, Irving and himself played boys’ games through long Gallifreyan afternoons in the garden. He always had some small semblance of affection for her, attempting to include her when the games weren’t too rough and rushing to her aid when she ended up hiding in a dangerous area; for example once she found herself caught in a rose bush full of Gallifreyan Roses, being rescued covered in scratches and pricks. Often when saved by The Doctor and Koschei she would remark that she wished she had a friend like they had in each other.

He was violently yanked away from his memories by his Mother, standing now upright with her hand on his shoulder.

“Mum you really shouldn’t be up like this, it’s nearly time for your afternoon nap and you’ll be weak soon.” said Ohiya. She was quietly waved off with a gesture by The Doctor’s Mother with her other hand.

“Will you stay and help me get the old house in order, son? It’s all I have and it’s too great a task for one or two people. Your companion is welcome too if she can handle helping.” she said pleading.

The Doctor’s expression softened. Nirvi’s acknowledgement was enough to remind him that he was not dealing with the strict inner circle of time lord society. He looked at Nirvi and nodded a sort of unspoken acknowledgement. It was the Lungbarrow’s luck that the

TARDIS had landed at the beginning of the month in 1969; for at the moment it seems the Time Lord had some time to lord over.

For the next few days The Doctor and Nirvi played handiman about the house, fixing up the structure, tending the gardens and cleaning. Nirvi followed behind The Doctor closely to assist in whatever task was going on; although a growing undercurrent of boredom was developing under time.

From time to time, Nirvi attempted to talk about the missing time The Doctor had gone from, but every time she mentioned it he was strangely non-committal; but honest. On the second day a greater epiphany hit her.

"8 years, you said?" asked Nirvi.

"Hm?" asked The Doctor, elbow deep into cleaning a vase.

"It's just that when we came here, you said 8 years were wrong on the Calendars; but your Mother said your trip you forgot was only for 3 years. So..." asked Nirvi as her thoughts trailed off.

"You're right, that is VERY perplexing. Sure someone might forget 3 years b-" The Doctor started.

"No one just forgets 3 years." said Nirvi in a patronizing tone.

"You could when you're a Time Lord. What's 3 years in 3000?" replied The Doctor, cheekily.

"Fine. No one who actually wants to make a difference in the universe forgets 3 years." Nirvi said frustrated and stepped on his foot for good measure.

The Doctor looked down hurt at her remark; but let it pass right off him without any lasting personal consequence. His mind was continuously searching; sifting through mountains of adventures and times looking for what was now 8 years of time for some clue as to what happened. All the while working about the estate doing mindless maintenance.

It wasn't until the 4th day, during some routine polishing of The Doctor's ceremonial coat of arms that Nirvi first left his side, asking if she could go grab some polish from the kitchen.

Down the stairs and through the grand foyer Nirvi made her way past the incredible paintings that stared at you in the foyer and towards a doorway just past the sitting area. She normally wouldn't be moving at such a speed about the house, but with the

Doctor's Mother down for a nap a little bit of shenanigans helped to liven up the pace. She even took the time to grab a shortbread from the cupboard as she passed by. Inside the Kitchen before she could even begin to search for time lord mansion polish, she was stopped dead in her tracks by a strange sight. Sat at the kitchen she found Ohiya holding her head with both hands sitting at the kitchen island.

"Are you alright?" asked Nirvi as she approached. Ohiya picked up her head, her eyes puffy and subtly surprised that she had not noticed Nirvi before she came in.

"Yes. It's nothing to concern yourself with." She said brushing off Nirvi with a distant tone in her voice and forcing a composed posture to her frame.

"Are you sure? Look I don't mean to pry but a lot of times a stranger can be a good ear to listen and get some outside perspective on a problem. And I'd be more than willing to help you out if you needed it." She said.

Ohiya thought about it for a moment, and before long she made a decision to confide.

"Alright, yeah. Maybe a simpler view on things would help." Ohiya said.

"I just have so much to juggle these days. My own family was fractured, helping society recover after the war, seeing my brother dragged off to Shada as a criminal and then picking up the slack taking care of his mother when The Doctor left. I just wish I could go back and even have a meal with my family the way I used to; the way things used to be before all of this mess started" Ohiya said sighing and looking down.

"I know how you feel. I'm kind of the one who did all the breaking apart in my family; being of the nontraditional sort in a conservative type of people. I think quite a few of them have disowned me; and I spent some time in my schooling trying to find ways to temporarily fulfill what I was missing. At the end of the day; I long for the day that I could hear my mum and my dad on the line asking me to come home and enjoy an evening catching up. Maybe do a prayer or have dinner, pretending to be a perfect family again. Never will happen, but I would love the opportunity." she said. Across the counter, she reached over and took Ohiya's hand in her own, looking into her eyes and smiling, though her own were blurring with a tear or two.

"Things get better though. Eventually when you figure out how deep the hole in your life is, you start to go find a different spot where things are more secure." Nirvi said, pausing before she smiled, "And then you dig yourself into a new hole I suppose."

"Or you fill it with something else, like tea and cakes or revenge." Ohiya said giving a light chuckle. Nirvi laughed too.

After a few good chuckles, Nirvi turned serious for a moment. It was as good a time as any for the questions she was about to ask.

“Ohiya, why did the Doctor leave his mother the last time? And why can’t he remember the entire period?” she asked.

“I don’t know, honestly. I came back to caring for her after he had left and only heard a rumor that it had to do with some lingering effect of the war. Honestly though when I did see him during the period he seemed as though something was eating at him...” she said, her words trailing off into her thoughts.

“He’s kind of doing the same thing now, I’ve noticed.” she said looking down.

“Maybe; but it was a little bit different then. A little more bothered than dutiful and scatter brained. Perhaps you should talk to his Mother. She may be able to fill you in better.” she said smiling.

The thought hadn’t occurred to Nirvi yet at all. She was just such an imposing figure about the estate that Nirvi had often wondered if that upper class superiority complex was something that she would be able to stomach or if she would just throw up after a few lines of conversation.

Finding the time to talk to her in private was a different affair. She ended up making a plan with Ohiya to take The Doctor over to her family estate the next day for a bit of reminiscing to give Nirvi a chance to have a chat with The Doctor’s Mother.

Sitting down to tea, she sat down and sipped in the sunlight across the table from The Doctor’s Mother.

“So, how are you enjoying the accommodations, dear?” she asked with a cold, but pleasant tone.

“Very well. It’s a bit strange Gallifrey; but not uncomfortable or alien. Like looking into a still painting and seeing the perspective askew; but I think it’s beautiful in character: eccentric and nostalgic at the same time. ” she said smiling, compartmentalizing her thoughts on the nuances of her thoughts on aliens having the sensibilities upper class white british architecture to a small corner so as not to offend.

“I’m glad to hear you’re comfortable. My son’s friends are an odd sort, coming from all walks of life often searching for something. I don’t mean to pry, but with the sort of life he leads I hope you find what you are looking for sooner than later.” she said before taking a sip.

There was something about The Doctor's Mother's posture that put Nirvi on edge. Powerful, upright and a grand presence, she commanded attention despite the calm that radiated from her being. Perhaps The Doctor's Mother was the most dangerous person Nirvi had ever met: someone with the strength to swing an axe and chop your head off or just as quickly convince someone to do it for her through a mere suggestion.

"Actually, there is something I was looking for in this meeting. I was hoping to talk to you about The Doctor's last visit here" Nirvi said with a growing sense of awkwardness.

"Very well. What would you like to know?" asked The Doctor's Mother

"Well, what happened?" asked Nirvi.

"As I said before, my son was called here to care for me when I was sick. The humorous irony of him being called The Doctor while making a house call doesn't escape me in this scenario." said The Doctor's Mother with a light smile.

"What did he do while he was here?" Nirvi asked.

"Mainly cared for the mansion; took care of me during my sickness and sorted out affairs while I was unwell. It was mostly a shockingly uneventful episode for anything involving my son, to be honest. In the end he left as the disease had finally subsided and we had some solid evidence that the worst of the symptoms had passed." The Doctor's Mother replied.

"Why did he leave? Got a bit stir crazy?" Nirvi asked, feeling that herself.

"No, it was... Gallifreyan politics. No one from our family has ever had the stomach for them: Susan, Irving, Norvid or even myself quite frankly." she replied gazing out the window.

Nirvi sighed and looked out the same window with her. Nothing about this scenario seemed out of place or worth hiding. The bland nature of the whole affair just painted The Doctor as a dutiful son; no mysteries to look for there. He might have even forgotten the whole trip out of sheer boredom.

There was one last question to Nirvi's interrogation that had yet to be answered though, and it was the most confusing one.

"Why do you honestly think he's forgotten that trip then?" Nirvi asked.

The Doctor's Mother did not look away from the window, but sighed for a second before replying. "I think sometimes my son just has other priorities that he'd like to keep at the forefront of his mind. Being "The Doctor" is one of them; but one day when he does

return and return permanently, I hope to provide him with a happy and warm home free of the stress.” she paused, and in a moment Nirvi thought she saw a tinge of sadness in her eyes.

“He will... be able to see this as his home again; something removed from what he perceives as Gallifrey.” she said before getting up for her afternoon nap.

Tea time was over after that with The Doctor returning as if on a cue from the other estate. Nirvi went about her business silently, attempting to digest what she had talked about with The Doctor’s Mother. On the most superficial level perhaps, she did want what she thought was best for her son in this life of comfort and privilege; but on the other hand did she truly believe The Doctor could truly be happy ignoring the beauty of the universe for this? And what exactly was so abhorrent about politics that could cause traumatic, willful amnesia and ignorance?

There was something unnerving about the conversation; and Nirvi was sure she was hiding something behind that pleasant-yet-detached facade. What was it about the upper class on every planet? If they didn’t have some sense of smug superiority about them then they had some unpleasant obsession with their outward perception; as if keeping one’s problems inside and tucked away made them any better than airing them out when they happened and clearing the air. And what was so wrong with being honest anyways? Not even her parents understood that about her, and the way she felt about that.

“It’s just that in the long run, I’m a bit confused as to how she thinks letting The Doctor bury himself in other things is supposed to help him. He ought to be discussing, digging.... Facing the problems and seeking solutions. Y’know, looking to get better instead of hiding it.” Nirvi said later in the kitchen while talking to Ohiya over a cup of tea in private.

“But what if the whole situation is something he wants to forget? What if it’s something he just wants to move on from? You saw how he was when he came here, uptight and unnerved: what if that’s unconsciously a symptom of how uncomfortable it is?” asked Ohiya before taking a sip.

“Then he still has to face it all, Ohiya. It’s better to just take things head on and force him to remember, otherwise how is he ever going to recognize he has a problem?” answered Nirvi with a rhetorical question. She breathed in deep and looked toward the ceiling, venting her frustration with the situation in a remark, “Stupid man. Thinking he knows what’s best for himself.” as she exhaled in a huff. Ohiya quietly considered Nirvi’s words then took her hands and looked into her eyes.

“Perhaps you’re right. I heard a small tidbit of a story once from the Doctor’s Mother that I believe might have been a clue; and I think that it might lead to exactly what we need for this situation.” said Ohiya with a trusting smile and some excitement. Nirvi hugged her with a tight, friendly embrace in approval of the suggestion.

“Thank you thank you thank you! We’re going to get to the bottom of this!” she said before letting go and wiping a single tear from her eye.

“It’s my pleasure dear. Tomorrow at 1 meet me with the Doctor in the gardens. It should be after The Doctor’s Mother lays down for her nap, and I will show him something that should help him remember” said Ohiya with a grin.

That night Nirvi lay in bed, her mind animated by the possibility of what would happen tomorrow. Finding out more about The Doctor, clearing up the mist around his mystery so that maybe they could be on the same level for the first time in a long while. The possibility was tantalizing, and a few times she sat up and looked at The Doctor pleasantly resting. She pictured the relief on his face and the incredible gratitude he would have for his friends at recovering 8 years of his life.

The next morning came like any other; though The Doctor seemed to be a little more erratic during the day. A subtle consequence of being in one spot for too long, he had convinced himself. Plus, the work was almost done and it would soon be time to leave. His mind wandered as he walked the halls, drawn into conversations with deceased relatives and drawn into the occasional debate over his adventuring with the homebodies.

As lunch approached, The Doctor noticed something strange about Nirvi’s behavior as well; but chose not to mention anything to observe if there was a pattern to it. He had a great sense of relief that she and Ohiya had grown into what seemed like friends, but wondered if there were things about Ohiya that offended Nirvi. They had hardly had any conversations at Lungbarrow, but it was clear that Ohiya was on her best behavior to Nirvi. Still, Nirvi was hardly one for tact with strangers or new acquaintances; so perhaps Ohiya had done some maturing as well.

After lunch, the Doctor met with Nirvi and Ohiya in the gardens, the two of them facing with a large flat rectangle covered in a sheet. The sense of unease from the morning grew in the Doctor.

“Now what you’re about to see if going to give you those years you cannot remember back, Doctor. And I think that’s for the best. No matter what happens we’ll be here for you and it’ll be good to work through while surrounded by friends.” said Nirvi.

The Doctor screamed a powerful “No” mentally, but without any sort of audible change to his outward expression Ohiya unwrapped the rectangle revealing a portrait of a male child, wearing the robes of an adult time lord. His face, his eyes were familiar; alluring. After a second or two of looking into his eyes The Doctor was drawn in, unable to look away. Terror grew on his face as the realization grew inside him, and his spine tensed up. Psychically, inside his mind he heard a familiar voice speak to him. “Father.” it said.

The Doctor’s Son was in this portrait, fresh in his second regeneration. The Father of Susan; ideally the current head of the Lungbarrow estate.

The Doctor’s mind struggled and screamed; attempting to reject the reality; to cope in some small way. It boiled with memories struggling to take shape or be contained, and the all too real picture in front of him seared a shocking reminder like a hot, powerful lash across his hearts that left him speechless.

“Father, I’m scared. Father, what has happened to me?” asked the portrait to the Doctor. A tear fell from The Doctor’s face.

“My child. My child I...” The Doctor said before standing up straight. His mind snapped away to a memory years ago, in that very garden.

His daughter had regenerated! A son? His son was back, and he had regenerated into a child! For three years he had watched his daughter’s health fade, unsure of whether or not she had the same disease while taking care of his mother, and now here he was. A portrait was made to commemorate the occasion. He was alive and well!

That night when the two of them were celebrating the good news, The Doctor and his son were on the balcony overlooking the garden gazing into the night time sky of grand dark blue and purple with green and orange explosions of starlight bursting through. All at once The Doctor saw a meteor fly by and went to go point it out to his son when he felt himself pushed off balance and fall towards the ground.

It wasn’t a second after the fall when he heard his son’s screams and came running despite the injury. He ran upstairs grabbing a defensive weapon he had stashed from the war on the way by. But the screams had signified not a cry of help, but a cry of pain; the cry of defeat. When the Doctor reached the balcony after sprinting through the mansion he saw his mother on her knees pleading mercy and his son standing before him with a look of pure terror in his eyes. The last Shroud had taken over the body of his son.

The Doctor begged and wept, offering up his body to his enemy from the War in Heaven. The Shroud refused, maniacally wearing an unnatural smile on his face. It

would not be reasoned with: The Doctor attempted to appeal to The Shroud, claiming his part in the war was to protect his wife and that he never had a stomach for the politics of Time Lord society that would have led to him taking part in it willingly.

The Shroud considered his plea for a brief second, but rejected it based off the long, cold genocide the Time Lords had committed on them in the War in Heaven, chief among them The Doctor. Instead, The Shroud gave him a sadistic choice: The Shroud would just walk away, and The Doctor could either let the last of The Shroud in the universe live or kill his son. Walking away, The Shroud kept the face plainly faced towards The Doctor, unblinking. The Shroud had purposely left the expression of fear in his son's eyes to go along with it's terrifying smile.

For five years afterwards, the Doctor shirked the laws of time, wandering along his own time stream during his travels home after the war. He travelled along the time he had spent hunting down The Shroud after their final defeat in the War's Aftermath. If he could just find the exact moment If he could kill his younger self with as little damage to the time stream as possible he would do it. His son could be saved because there would be no reason for The Shroud to be there to take over his son if he succeeded.

But as he searched through time, every moment was precious. Every event that he traced backwards along his timeline him saving someone from the remnants of the Shroud massacring innocents. Some remnant of The Shroud that he had conversely caused to be there by the effect of his post war hunting; a sort of desperation as they ran like wounded animals from place to place looking to survive. Moving back further and further, he eventually found himself in the beginning of his hunt; on the day of his wife's death.

There he was, the last day of The War In Heaven, his weapon trained on his younger self from afar. He was ready, his target was in his sights and the corrective aiming system was calibrated. He was a trigger squeeze away when time froze around him; some odd effect of the time stream crossing mixed with the War in Heaven's time weapons.

"Hello? Hello?!?" came a voice from a nearby communicator on a dead soldier. The Doctor's eyes welled up. It was the voice of Mercy, his eternal love. He ran over, seized the communicator and answered; not even trying to comprehend why time had chosen not to freeze her.

"Can you hear me? Can anyone hear me? I'm confused, I'm scared and I don't even know if this is real. I...I don't want to die." said Mercy over the speaker.

The Doctor hesitated. He shouldn't; but he needed to have this talk. With a moment of composure, he breathed a deep sigh and spoke.

"Yes, I can hear you."

"Love, is that you?" she asked with a hopeful tone and overwhelming emotion in her words.

"Yes, but I'm n-"

"No, it wouldn't be. You're still there too, the younger you. I can feel him down there still. Have you come t-"

"No, I'm here to take care of him." The Doctor said, his voice exhausted and lost.

"Take care of him? What do yo- No!" she cried out.

"It has to be this way, Mercy." said the Doctor

"Why?" she asked, her optimism in her voice gone.

"Our child... They're..." The Doctor started. He was unable to finish the sentence. He began sobbing uncontrollably.

"What happened? Doctor? Love, please tell me what has happened!"

"He's dead, Mercy. Our child is dead because of me, and I can't let them be dead because of me. Mercy, I can't. I just can't; I have to do this." he said as he raised his gun again.

Mercy cried. She cried loud and audibly. The Doctor's gun shook with every wail. He listened, repeating "Please" in his head to himself. Please have the courage. Please have the strength. Please save your only child.

After a few moments in stalemate, Mercy calmed enough to speak, choking back tears and hysterics.

"Love, c-can you hear me? Time is still frozen, so you must be there. C-can you... just listen?"

The Doctor lowered his gun and hesitantly made an audible sound so as to acknowledge her.

"Doctor, I-i'm scared. I'm staring at a fireball mere feet away frozen in time; and a door locked by time itself and I can't escape. I'm about to die. I just said goodbye to you..."

the younger you and I'm proud that I sounded so brave. But I'm not that brave; I...I don't want to die. I don't want to sacrifice myself for the war councils or the good of the universe. I just wish we could go home. I wish I could never face this again. I wish I could see you and the look on your face for tea time with your mother and gardening and... I wish I could live with you forever." she sobbed again for a few seconds before speaking again. She then spoke with more confidence, attempting what little facade she could of bravery through her anguish.

"I can't though, can I? And for all the wonderful things, secret night excursions and parties across the cosmos; righting wrongs and saving the unsaveable... I can't be saved now. But you can. And you can save other people. And you can make sure there's a beautiful, lively universe. You can... Doctor you can save them all with all your wit and charm and hope. One day, even this will be able to be put behind you I promise you. But...there will always be people who need help. Please. Everyone needs that, I need that from you now. Look, I can't make your dreams come true again but I can save you from your nightmares today! I'm here still! And I still love you!" she said before taking a deep breath to finish her last statement.

"And I forgive you." said Mercy.

"I'm sorry you had to die." The Doctor said at the present looking toward the picture of his son as he was pulled back out of his memories; deep sadness and regret still lingering on despite his full recovery of his memories. It was in the moment that he had finished that final conversation with Mercy that he had forcibly let the death of his child go; the moment he had adopted his cycling five year immediate memory. His own shocked and traumatized brain had forcibly purged it so he could keep being The Doctor. Nirvi was peeking from behind Ohiya's shoulder expectantly, curiously observing the Time Lord's demeanor changes.

"He's cured, Ohiya! He's been cured and has his memories!" said Nirvi, ecstatic over the change that she had brought about. She heard Ohiya suck in breath with satisfaction.

"Yes, there he is Nirvi. That's him, the man I know. Rejoice, Gallifrey, it's The Return of The Doctor; murderer of his own son, prisoner of both my brother and his own granddaughter and prejudiced genocide machine of different races across the cosmos. You chained up your best friend, someone who loved you more than the universe itself for your imperialist tendencies! And for what? So the universe could be your personal zoo? ...Look at him now, Nirvi! See him now with that proud, straight posture like a true monster; picking winners and losers throughout the cosmos. He even killed his own child; and now that's all he has to say when faced with the reality he conveniently forgot. Well the losers struck back today, didn't they? The losers dealt a blow and finally you

know what it feels like to be betrayed; to be deconstructed on your faults... to be considered less of a person by the people you look down on. Thanks for that; it's as satisfying a feeling as I can get." Ohiya said as she walked away laughing like a madwoman, leaving the picture lying against a wall.

The Doctor looked down, his head hanging in pure emotional anguish.

"Let's get the hell out of here." Nirvi said, grabbing his hand. The Doctor ripped it away, but turned and walked with Nirvi silently away from the garden. His head continued to hang and his eyes stay fixed towards the ground. The Doctor's sauntering shuffle was sad and his mind was overloaded and processing constantly in a futile effort. His body posture was labored but straight up and proud like a disgraced prince.

At the door back home, Nirvi and The Doctor found The Doctor's Mother standing in the way. There was a look of understanding on her face, and upon reaching them her son wrapped a tight embrace around her and breathed deep; barely holding back his emotions. He whispered in her ear, "One day, I shall come back... yes, I shall come back."

Nirvi embraced The Doctor's Mother as well. She didn't know what to say in situations like these, she barely had the tools to comprehend them; much less express them. Was the Doctor a murderer now? Was he always something more than a friend or companion? More than a Time Lord?

One thing was for certain: he was a bigger mystery than ever now, maybe even a different man. Not for a single moment did Nirvi wonder if she had been in the wrong for forcing The Doctor to relive all those memories, but now that she knew about his past was The Doctor a safe person to travel with? She hoped so. Was there some greater point of reflection she should be aiming for? Probably. And she had an important point in human history and politics in all of time to get back to: The Stonewall Riots!

The door closed with a gentle push from the broken Doctor and faded away. The Doctor was gone, without so much more than the lack of dust on the old estate to mark his presence.

"You know, I live for the days he says that." The Doctor's Mother said, sitting down in her wheelchair to rest and looking over to Ohiya walking over.

"I think I shall miss him until that next visit as well." said Ohiya with a nostalgic look in her eyes as she stood behind The Doctor's Mother. She had just gotten back from putting the painting away again.

Relative Dimensions: The Lives and Times of the Commonwealth Doctor

by Broken Mirrors

What if Pete's World, the alternate universe of Series 2, had an alternate version of Doctor Who as well?

Part 1: Time's Champion

Once upon a time there was a magical TV show that could do anything because it was about everything. Even cancellation didn't stop it. And that magical show aired in every universe there was, a fixed point in time if ever there was one. Why, it even aired in a universe where great Britain was a republic and Zeppelins sailed through the air. I'm sure you've seen this universe, somewhere in your dreams or your hazy, hazy memories. Yes, Pete's World did have a Doctor, just like our world has a Doctor. But who was that Doctor, I hear you ask? Doctor whom, precisely?

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An Adventure In Space And Time - Wikipedia

An Adventure In Space And Time is a 2013 British biographical film focusing on the creation of the popular science fiction television series *Doctor Who*, with emphasis on actor Stanley Baker, who portrayed the original incarnation of the show's main character, the Doctor. It was directed by Terry McDonough, and written by regular *Doctor Who* writer Mark Gatiss. It premiered on BBC Two in the Republic of Britain on 21 November 2013, and later that year in the rest of the world. ^{[3][4][5][6][7]}

Luke Evans portrays Baker in the film, which later led to him being cast as the First Doctor himself in the 2017 *Doctor Who* episodes "The Doctor Falls" and "Twice Upon a Time"^[8] and in a series of audio adventures for Big Finish Productions.^[9] It also stars

Brian Cox, Jessica Raine, and features special appearances by Ian McNeice and Benjamin Mitchell.

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The Dalek Invasion of Earth

The doors to the Ship suddenly closed, locking Susan outside with David.

"Grandfather!" she shouted.

"Listen, Susan," came her grandfather's voice, smooth and deep, like the calm river beside them, "I've deadlocked the doors, you can't get in. Now, move back, child, where I can see you."

She stepped back, looking up at the camera only she could see. Inside, her grandfather, Dr. Who, watched her on the scanner. She couldn't see him, but she knew what he must look like right now, his tall forehead covered in grime, his wild gray hair all a mess, his wide jaw held tight and grim.

He spoke, his lilting accent sounding like music over the Ship's speakers. "During all the years I've been taking care of you, you in return have been taking care of me."

"Oh, grandfather," she yelled, "I belong with you!"

"Not any longer, Susan! You're still my grandchild, and always will be. But now, you're a woman, too. I want you to belong somewhere, to have... *roots* of your own. With David, you'll be able to find those roots and live, normally, like any woman should do. Believe me, my dear, your future lies with David, and not with a silly old buffer like me."

Inside the Ship, Dr. Who turned away from the scanner, his hand on his cheek. He realized, then, that there was nobody there to see him, and so he needn't try to hide his tears. He looked back to the scanner, to Susan's face, and continued, "One day, I shall come back... Yes, I shall come back. Until then, there must be no tears, no regrets, no anxieties." His voice wavered as he spoke, watching tears stream down Susan's cheeks, "Just go forward in all your beliefs," he said, "And prove to me I am not mistaken in mine."

As Susan nodded in silent, sobbing response, he placed his hand on the dematerialization circuit. "Goodbye, Susan," he said, his rich voice cracking with sorrow, with joy, with love, "Goodbye my dear." And with a wheezing groan, both he and the Ship disappeared.

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Radio Times, 1973, "Ten Years of Doctor Who" Special Interview

VERITY LAMBERT: Sydney insisted the old man character should have some gravitas, some authority. Someone suggested perhaps he should be a doctor, a man of learning and science. Now, at the time we were walking through a production office, and someone had hung up a great number of film posters on the wall. Sydney stopped us in front of one of the posters and pointed up at it, a poster for *This Sporting Life*. He said "I want the fella from that movie!" We thought he meant Richard Harris at first, which, of course-- (Verity laughs at the memory)

VERITY LAMBERT: It turned out he meant Stanley, who of course was also in it. Such a versatile man, he could be any age you needed to cast him as. What surprised me was Sydney's reason, however. He said that the Republic was still young in the world, still new by the modern reckoning. He wanted to foster a stronger identity for the nation, so he cast two english teachers as the heroes but then cast a welshman as their mentor, their trickster, the one who gets them into trouble and drives the story forward. Moreover, he insisted that Stanley play the part with his natural Welsh accent, that lilting, baritone sing-song. It turned out marvelously, of course. I remember Stanley saying, oh, must have been during that first production when we were working with all those cavemen in smudgey face, he said to us, "You know, I think this program could run for five years." (Verity laughs again)

VERITY LAMBERT: Of course, Stanley will be making an appearance on the program this coming anniversary. I suppose this issue may already be out by the time of his special appearance, though. He's so busy now, you know, he's a big time producer. I'm amazed they managed to get him (Verity laughs)

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The Three Doctors

The scanner suddenly began to flicker as the two incarnations of the same alien man worked at the controls, arguing with each other. "Here, you've been feddlin' with it, haven't you?" accused the second Doctor Who.

Doctor Who bristled. "It was perfectly alright until you touched it, now, if only you'd leave things to me--"

"If we were to leave things up to you, dear fella, we'd be hroight in the crick, wouldn't we?" The fat Doctor chuckled at his tall, thin counterpart.

"Look, you lost the image, you oaf, not me!"

Benton rolled his eyes. "There they go again," he sighed. He and Jo Grant had their backs turned to the bickering Doctors Who, watching the scanner screen flicker and fizzle. As the two men shouted, however, something began to materialize in the darkness of the screen, a tall, dark figure.

"Doctor, look!" shouted Jo as the image took shape, "Both of you!". It was a man, broad-shouldered and slumped over, hovering in a green polyhedron. His square jaw and firm brow made him look handsome but somewhat thuggish, like a soldier or a footballer. His gray hair was in a mess, a tall forehead split by a widow's peak. The two Doctors approached the screen in shock, staring at their former face.

"Hello there," the man on the screen greeted the other two with a jovial sing-song, "So, you're my replacements? A fatty and a drunk?" The two Doctors glanced at one another, as though wondering which was which. "Have you done anything?" he asked them.

"Ah, well, we've assised the situation--" the fat Doctor Who asserted, before the first Doctor Who cut him off.

"Just as I thought, nothing."

"Well, hrmph," the thin Doctor responded gravely, "It's not easy, you know."

"Et's not as if we know what thet stuff is!" added the fat Doctor.

"I'll tell you what it is," the first Doctor retorted, "It's a Time Bridge."

The two Doctors looked at each other again. "I see," whispered the thin Doctor, his eyes darting between his two other incarnations.

"Now, what's a bridge for?"asked the first Doctor Who.

"Well, um--" the second Doctor Who began before being rudely interrupted.

"Crossing!" shouted the third Doctor Who, punching his fatter self on the shoulder.

"Right!" the first Doctor Who acknowledged, his voice low and smooth, "So stop dilly-dallying and cross it!" And, just as quickly as he had appeared, he disappeared, his image fading from view.

"You've faded him again, you dunce!" the thin Doctor yelled, rushing to the controls.

"I've done no such thing!" The fat Doctor replied, the two of them fiddling with controls to try and bring back their predecessor.

Jo ran over to the two of them as they argued and interjected, "Doctor! I hate to ask, but who was that man?"

"Me," both Doctors replied in unison, then turned to the other and insisted, "Me!"

The second Doctor drew a coin from his pocket. "Call it, will you?" he said, flipping it.

"Tails," the third Doctor called.

The second Doctor glanced at the coin, rolled his eyes, and responded, "Hard luck," before putting it back in his pocket.

"Alright," the third Doctor barked, "Stand by to disconnect the force-field."

"Doctor," asked Benton, "What are you going to do?"

In lieu of responding, the Doctor shouted, "Now!" and ran through the doors of the TARDIS.

"Doctor, no!" yelled Jo, running after him.

"Jo, get back!" he yelled, moving to push her away as they were both struck by the anti-matter monster, instantly disintegrating them.

???

An Adventure in Space and Time

Baker stood in the studio, staring up at the lights. His memory of it all floated there, frozen in that last moment. "So this is how it ends," he had told his wife last night. It was only now seeming real.

Someone cleared their throat, catching Baker's attention. He looked down at the man, rotund and jowly. Pithey. His replacement. "Will then, who's who, eh?" the fat man joked, chuckling and approaching Baker. They shared a handshake. "I won't loi to you," he said in a thick south african accent, "I'm skeired steff."

"Oh, you'll be fine," Baker told him, resting his weight on the console, "In fact, you'll be wonderful. I told them, you know, 'there's only one man in the entire world who can take over'."

"Oh, couldn't they get him?"

Both actors chuckled. Baker, feeling tired, turned and walked to the console, bending down to turn on the rotor mechanism. Pithey and the other actors left the set as the crew prepared to film. Baker stood and rested his weight on the console, his back and legs aching. He knew he couldn't keep this up forever. It was better to move on now than to be tied down to one role forever, and he still had production ahead of him.

He gazed down at his hands, hearing the motion of the others in the studio quiet down as the cameras began rolling. Silence filled the air. He raised his gaze and prepared for action. And he stopped.

There was a man standing across the console from him.

Baker had never seen the man before, but he knew, the very moment he laid eyes on him, exactly who he was. He was olive skinned, with black hair and kind, dark eyes. His jaw was heavy, and his face kind. He was the future.

Stanley Baker smiled, and the Doctor smiled back.

THE END.

???

Radio Times, 1966, TV Listings

THE DALEKS ARE BACK as Polly and Ben soon find out in tonight's new adventure.

Events move too fast for the *Tardis* travellers to puzzle long over the apparent change in Dr. Who—for in today's episode, they face the greatest and most indestructible enemy—the Daleks. Other menaces such as the War Machines, the blonde Drahavians, and the ant-beetle Zarbis have all been overcome—but not the Daleks.

Many times in the past the Doctor has appeared to be the victor, to have destroyed the Daleks for ever, but the power of evil they represent has proved too strong for them to perish entirely. They always return more terrible than before and pledge to the Dalek law which says that 'all human beings must be ex-ter-min-ated.'

In this new six-part adventure set on the planet Vulcan, a colony of Earth, the Daleks emerge in a new guise. They are supposedly obedient and servile to their masters on Vulcan. But the Doctor knows the Daleks and realises their potential threat. He senses treachery and danger. But will the leaders of the planet heed his warnings?

Wensley Pithey, well known to children viewers for his role as Friar Tuck, appears in this serial as the new Dr. Who. Bernard Archard, who played Colonel Pinto in the *Spycatcher* series, appears as Bragen, Chief of Security in the colony.

The voices of the Daleks are again spoken by Peter Hawkins, who has recorded between 800 and 900 television programmes. And Christopher Barry, who was responsible for bringing to the screen the first Daleks, returns to direct the new adventure.

DR. WHO

An adventure in space and time starring

WENSLEY PITHEY

as Dr. Who

with

Bernard Archard, Robert James, Anneke Wills, Michael Craze

?

The Power of the Daleks

BY DAVID WHITAKER

Part 1: Who's the Doctor?—Ben and Polly try to discover the answer.

Cast in order of appearance:

Dr. Who.....WENSLEY PITHEY
Polly.....ANNEKE WILLS
Ben.....MICHAEL CRAZE
The Examiner.....MARTIN KING
Quin.....NICHOLAS HAWTREY
Bragen.....BERNARD ARCHARD
Lesterson.....ROBERT JAMES
Janley.....PAMELA ANN DAVY
Hensell.....PETER BATHURST
Title music by Ron Grainer
and the BBC Radiophonic Workshop
Designer. Derek Dodd
Producer, Innes Lloyd
Directed by CHRISTOPHER BARRY
See Page 3

???

The Tomb of the Cybermen

The Doctor took Victoria's hand in his and asked her, quietly, "Are you heppy with us, Victoria?" His accent, normally so thick and strange, seemed softer now, less brash. "Yes, I am," she said, nodding, then confessed, "At least, I would be if my father were here."

"Yes, I know, I know," the Doctor said. He looked out at her with large, soft eyes, his wide face still and welcoming.

"I wonder what he would have thought if he could see me now," She said wistfully.

"Yes, you miss him very much, don't you?" The Doctor responded.

"It's only when I close my eyes," she said, "I can still see him standing there. Before those horrible Dalek creatures came to the house. He was a very kind man. I shall never forget him. Never."

"No of course you won't. Though, you know, the memory of him won't alwehs be a sad one."

"I think it will. You can't understand, being so ancient."

"Oi!"

"I mean, so old," Victoria corrected herself.

“Ah.”

“You probably can't remember your family,” she said, a shade enviously.

“Oh yes I can, when I want to – and that's the point, really, I have to really *want* to, to bring them back in front of my eyes.” As he spoke, he gestured at his eyes, large and round as saucers, “The rest of the time, they just sleep in my mind, and I forget.”

“And, so will you,” he said, touching Victoria's nose as she tried to interject, “Oh yes, you will. You'll find there's so much else to think about.” He put his fingers on her chin, pulling her closer as he leaned in and whispered conspiratorially to her: “Our loives are different to anybody else's. That's the exciting thing. There's nobody in the universe can do what we're doing, hroight now.”

???

alt.rec.arts.dr.who, 1995, “What Doctor kicked the most arse?”

GIT:

On 1995-8-5, 22:28:37 +0000, INSPACE said

>While we can all agree Rea probably has the highest bodycount of
>any Doctor, I think the real debate has to come down between the
>third and fourth Doctors. Sure, Holder was an immortal supervillain
>before he was the Doctor, but Harris was an immortal supervillain
>*while* he was the Doctor.

“Immortal supervillain” puts it mildly. None of the other Pikey Doctors ever spoke out in favor of the fucking IRA. Just for that shit, I'd say he probably has a higher actual bodycount than any other Doctor.

???

Third Doctor | /who/ Wiki | FANDOM Powered by Wikia

“Remember to SPLINK or I'll fuck you bloody, you little cunts!”

– The Third Doctor's catchphrase

The Third Doctor, also known as **the IRA Doctor**, was played by Richard “Cocaine” Harris from 1970 to 1974 as a violently ranting drunken Irishman. He was noted for his incredible fondness for Guinness and 14 year olds.

Story

After the Second Doctor keeled over dead of a heart attack, type 2 diabetes, and gout at age 24 and was forced to regenerate, Harris took over working alongside the Brigadier and UNIT.

Character

The Third Doctor beat the shit out of his enemies with literally anything he could get his hands on, from broken bottles to his own teeth. He would straight up beat a motherfucker *with* a motherfucker. Speaking of, he almost certainly fucked your mother. If you're 16 or fewer years younger than your mother and you can't touch alcohol without going into a blind rage, you're probably one of Harris's kids, and certainly too old to be reading the /who/ wiki.

At the start, the Third Doctor would build stupid shit and do stupid science experiments, but it quickly became clear that the only value these stupid plot devices had was getting him mad. Before long they found other stupid things to get him mad, like Jo Grant. The third Doctor loved to drive fast cars, though never while sober.

The Third Doctor was actually played with a lot of subtlety, moreso than fans tend to give him credit for. His personality could be harsh and abrasive, but was always revealingly human in the process, and he could turn on the charm and warmth in a heartbeat, making him seem like a man full of kindness and optimism who nevertheless would always end up brutally disappointed.

Style

Three has been coined “the Hungover Doctor” due to his fanciful yet ragged dress, chief amongst them his iconic crushed velvet smoking jacket over a hand-sewn sweater and loose cravat. He also goosestepped around in Doc Marten waffle-stompers, though he was only a skinhead on the very top of his head. Exactly what color the third Doctor's hair is remains a matter of considerable controversy among fans to this day, with arguments for grey, white, and blonde all making very clear and convincing points, though ultimately his true hair color was bald.

Appearances

Three had the second longest tenure of all classic Doctors, drunkenly staggering from *The Splinkhead from Space* to *Planet of the Splinkers*, before returning for *The Splink Doctors* oh wait, lol.

???

The Sea Devils

The Master stalked through the door, pistol at the ready. As he crossed the threshold though...

"HRAUGH!" came a bellow as the Doctor kicked the gun out of the Master's hand. It went clattering to the floor as the Doctor took the Master by the collar and popped him one, sending the rival Time Lord flying. The Master hit the floor and rolled to a crouch in one motion, rubbing his jaw. He looked up at the Doctor, staying in a low stance as the Doctor circled him.

With a shout of violent glee, the Doctor charged at his opponent, and the Master expertly used the Doctor's momentum to send him flying over his shoulder. The Doctor landed hard on his back, but quickly scrambled to his feet, fists up in a defensive posture.

The two traded blows, their fight carrying them into the next room. The Master swept the Doctor's leg, knocking him onto the table, then as he brought his elbow down the Doctor rolled out of the way, his boot connecting with the Master's face. In a flash, the Doctor was on top of the Master, his cherry red boot on the bald man's neck and his knee on his chest.

The Doctor grabbed a bottle of scotch off the table, popping the cork as he said, "I always find that violent exercise makes me thirsty." He took a swig from the large bottle. "Don't you agree?"

"You better enjoy your drink, Doctor," the Master hissed, looking up at his foe, "Because it might be your last."

In response, the Doctor smashed the bottle on the table next to him and brandished the jagged edge, "You think so?"

The two considered each other for a moment. The light glinted off the sharp edge of the bottle. The light glinted off the Master's smooth head. The Doctor looked at his makeshift knife, tossed it away, and took his foot off the Master's throat. He stepped away and let the Master get to his feet, then they squared off as equals.

The Master moved in aggressively. Two jabs, a left hook, a knee, an elbow. The Doctor defended as best as he could, but his foe's force was too great. Soon, the Master had the Doctor pinned in a corner, slugging the thinner man in the stomach. "You're good, Doctor!" The Master yelled, "But you're not good enough!"

The Doctor grunted, "Yes, well you haven't heard my clever oratory skills yet!" and then leapt up onto the Master, sinking his teeth into his ear. The Master hollered, teetering back to the table and toppled over it as the Doctor shoved him.

The Doctor looked down at his fallen, beaten foe, panting heavily, blood drooling out of his open mouth and dripping onto his shirt. "How many times have I told you?" He said, "Violence will never get you anywhere."

???

Radio Times, February 1974, "Dalek-builders"

May I congratulate you on your excellent *Dr Who Special*. The articles, photos, and especially the Terry Nation Dalek story with the twist in the tail, were excellent.

The Dalek construction plans will have no doubt inspired many a school to build their own Daleks. Who knows, the country could be invaded by an army of school Daleks!

Ah, but we'd be safe, as we'd have Dr Who to protect us!

Your Special has certainly made the year for *Dr Who* fans. A rather sad year due to the untimely death of the Master, alias Kenneth J. Warren. But I hope that in 15 years' time, in 1988, you will publish another Special to celebrate 25 years of wandering in time with the Doctor.

Peter Capaldi
(aged 15)

Glasgow

???

Hello Sailor! The Making of *The Sea Devils*

A still image of the Doctor mauling the Master is shown.

LETTS: I can't believe (uncontrollable laughter) I can't believe he really bit him.

BRIANT: That fight scene was one of the most unprofessional things I've ever filmed.

LETTS: Any time someone wrote a fight scene for him, we would always get a bit nervous, thinking, "Ohhh, is this the time he's going to lose it?"

Still images of the Doctor's fight scenes are shown, Richard Harris's feral face the focus of many.

LETTS: I suppose we should have known how it would end up, even back then, but Terrance was always pushing for more excitement, more action.

A clip from The Green Death plays, showing the Doctor taking a guard's arm over his shoulder, breaking it.

THE DOCTOR: 30th Century Queensbury rules, gentlemen. I do hope I haven't hurt you.

LETTS: It's a miracle Warren agreed to come back. Just a shame how it all worked out in the end.

???

History of Doctor Who # Third Doctor – Wikipedia

Another innovation of theirs from the eighth season onwards was the introduction of the character of the Master as a new nemesis for the Doctor, conceived as a Professor Moriarty to the Doctor's Sherlock Holmes. Played by Kenneth J. Warren, he became a highly popular character, although over the following two seasons it was felt, by both the Public, and the production company, that he became a little overused. Warren and the production team eventually agreed that he should be written out during the eleventh season by killing the character off, with some ambiguity as to whether or not he had died to save the Doctor.

However, before this story could be written, Warren died of a heart attack at the age of 43. His death had a profound effect on Harris. According to his account, with actress Katy Manning also having departed from her role as companion Jo Grant after three seasons, and Letts and Dicks both planning to move on, Harris felt that his "family" on the show was breaking up, and he decided to leave at the conclusion of the eleventh season in 1974 in order to pursue opportunities in film.

According to Elisabeth Sladen in an interview on the DVD release of *Invasion of the Dinosaurs* Harris physically struck a member of the production, rumored ^[by whom?] to be either script editor Terrance Dicks, writer Malcolm Hulke, or director Paddy Russell. In 1983, an anonymous letter ^[citation needed] published in Doctor Who Magazine accused Terrance Dicks of having a grudge against Richard Harris, thus explaining his absence from *The Five Doctors*. In *About Time, Volume 3*, Tat Wood and Lawrence Miles lay out a theory that Harris struck Dicks over a disagreement regarding his character's motivation and, rather than publicly fire the popular actor, the BBC agreed to allow Harris to step down quietly.

???

Planet of the Spiders

Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart walked into the laboratory, empty save for Sarah Jane Smith. When she saw him come in, she began gathering up her coat, as though she'd been in the process of leaving. "Hello, Ms. Smith," he said, curtly but warmly.

"Oh, hello Brigadier," Sarah Jane said, "I just thought I'd pop in and... well... to tell you the truth, I don't quite know why I popped in, actually."

"To see if there was any sign of the mad fellow, eh?" The Brigadier offered.

"Yes," she answered, looking down sadly, "But there can't be, can there? I mean, he's been gone over three weeks now."

"Oh, that's nothing," The Brigadier said, lost in memory, "One time I didn't see him for months. What's more, when he did turn up, he had a new face!" Sarah Jane looked back at him in mild disbelief as he continued, "He could have been a completely different man."

"No," Sarah said, her voice filled with regret, "He knew if he went back there, he'd destroy himself. We'll never see him again..."

Suddenly, a sound filled the air, a most marvelous, magnificent sound. Both Sarah and the Brigadier turned and watched as the blue box, the TARDIS, materialized in the laboratory with them.

Sarah's breath caught, her heart leapt into her throat, as the door opened and... there he was, her madman. "Got lost in the... time vortex," the Doctor slurred, slumping against the door frame, "The TARDIS... she brought me home..." And with those words he collapsed onto the lab floor, his slack face almost hanging off his head, almost-white blonde hair smeared across his forehead.

"Oh, Doctor," Sarah said, almost sobbing, "Why did you have to go back?"

"I had... had to face... my fear," he mumbled up at her. "That was... more important than just... going on..."

"Please..." she whispered, her eyes welling up, "Don't die."

The Doctor opened his heavy, drooping lids and looked up at her. "A tear, Sarah-Jane?"

He said, raising a finger to her cheek, "No... don't cry... While there's life... there's..."

His hand dropped to his chest. His eyes, slate blue, stared up at her blankly. His square jaw hung slack against his neck. His ragged breath fell silent.

Sarah gave a soft little sob, reached out with her fingers, and closed his eyes, sniffing quietly. She looked up at the Brigadier, crouched next to the Doctor's form, eyes full of silent fear and questions. He merely stared mournfully at their fallen friend alongside her.

There they remained for a time, quiet together around the Doctor's body. Sarah couldn't say how long. Their reverie, however, was broken: A sound, a presence, an energy

began to fill the room. She realized, quite suddenly, that someone else was in the laboratory with them, and she turned around to behold... the abbot!

"It's alright," said the small, bespectacled, levitating, and seemingly Tibetan man, "He is not dead."

"Oh no," Sarah sniffled, "I don't think I can take any more."

"I am sorry to have startled you, my dear," the mysterious man said.

The Brigadier stood, stepping forward next to Sarah, "Won't you introduce me to your friend, Miss Smith?"

"Oh, um, yes, this is the Abbot of—no, no, it's Cho-Je..." she stammered, squeezing her eyes shut and trying to get her facts straight, "I mean... it *looks* like Cho-Je but it's really K'Anpo Rinpoche." She lowered her gaze, trying to hide her tears and confusion. "I—I think."

"Thank you," The Brigadier responded, "That makes everything quite clear."

"The Doctor is alive," the levitating figure said.

"Oh no," Sarah said between sniffles, "You're wrong. He's--" she covered her eyes, "He's dead."

"All the cells of his body have been devastated by the Metebelis crystals," the Abbot replied, "But you forget: He is a Time Lord. I will give the process a little... push, and the cells will regenerate." The Abbot looked down at the sprawled figure of the Doctor, "He will become a new man."

The Brigadier looked from the Doctor to the Abbot, "What, you mean literally?"

"Of course," the Abbot said, "He will look quite different."

"Not again."

The Abbot continued. "And it will shake up the brain cells a little. You may find his behavior..." he closed his mouth in thought for a moment, a slight smirk playing across his features before he finished, "... somewhat erratic."

"Well, when will all this happen?" Sarah asked plaintively.

"There's no time like the present, is there?" The Abbot answered, and made a gesture at the Doctor's body. And just as mysteriously as he'd appeared, he began to disappear. Dematerialize, even. "Look after him..."

"Now, wait a moment!" the Brigadier said, making a move towards the man as he vanished, but before he'd take a full step he was gone, and then suddenly Sarah grabbed his elbow.

"Look, Brigadier! Look!" she said, the excitement rising in her voice, "I think it's starting!"

The Brigadier looked down at their fallen friend as his body began to change. His long, white-blond hair shrank into his scalp leaving it shiny and smooth. His already gangly limbs grew even longer, mismatched socks visibly poking out of his trousers. And, most surprisingly, his skin darkened, turning from an almost milk-white to a deep caramel brown.

“Well,” said the Brigadier, looking upon the tall black man lying on the laboratory floor, “Here we go again.”

???

Robot

The Brigadier stepped over to the wall, taking a receiver off the hook. “Get me the medical officer,” he ordered. When the connection was made, he addressed the surgeon at the other end, “Lieutenant Sullivan, emergency. Come to the lab at once.” “Sontarans... perverting the course of human history...” mumbled a heavily accented voice behind him. He hung up the phone and turned to look at the strange man, the strange Doctor, as he stirred on the floor.

“What’s he talking about, Miss Smith?”

“It’s something that happened when we first met,” she replied, and suddenly the man sat up, grabbing her by the shoulder.

“I tell you, Brigadier, there’s nothing to worry about!” said the man, looking up at the Brigadier with huge, wild eyes, “The brontosaurus is large, and placid!” And just like that, he was out, slumping back over on the floor.

At that moment, a man walked in, pelvis first. He was Lieutenant Harry Sullivan, a man comprised largely of sideburns. You could always tell when he entered a room, if only because of his almost-programmed greeting. “I say, is this the patient, sir?” Asked Harry, looking down at the Doctor.

“—And stupid!” shouted the Doctor as the surgeon stood over him. As Harry knelt down to check his vitals, the Doctor suddenly lurched up again, this time to his feet, simply springing up from a prone position. He grabbed the Brigadier by the arm, giving him an incredible, bone-breaking stare and asked, quickly but clearly, “If the square of the hypotenuse equals the sum of the square on the other two sides, why is a raven like a writing desk?”

The Brigadier, on the spot, responded, “Poe wrote on both?”

The Doctor’s eyes-of-the-sun stare suddenly broke and he blinked, his huge eyes rolling about in his head. “Poe wrote on both?” he said, letting go of the Brigadier and staggering back. “No, no no, no, Poe wrote on that little tray he’d keep by his bed, I always told him, Eddy, you’ve got that desk you drag everywhere with you but he said inspiration never came when he was sitting at a desk, you see, no, it’s always when you’re--” Then, as though he’d tripped over a thought, he simply tipped back on his heels and hit the floor again, falling right back to where he’d been. “Lying down,” the

Doctor sighed, an enormous grin on his face. He looked up at Sergeant Benton as he entered the room to deliver the daily reports to the Brigadier, eyeballing the man's eyebrows. "Oh," the Doctor added, "And inky quills, of course." His own eyebrows, sharp and arched, wiggled conspiratorially to Sarah-Jane.

The Doctor's head slumped back on the pillow Sarah had produced for him. "Take him to the sick bay," said Sullivan, "I'll make a proper examination there."

"What's happening sir?" asked Benton, "Who's..." he gestured at the unconscious black man.

"That, Mr. Benton," said the Brigadier, "Is the Doctor."

"Oh, you mean he's done it again? Changed himself, sir?"

"Apparently," the Brigadier said, sighing, "Saw it happen myself. Lieutenant Sullivan, I'm placing the Doctor in your personal charge. He's to have your full attention."

Harry nodded, smiling back. "Right-o, sir."

???

Geoffrey Holder | TARDIS Data Core Wiki | Fandom powered by Wikia

You may be looking for one or two narrative versions of Geoffrey Holder

Geoffrey Lamont Holder (born 1 August 1930, died 5 October 2014) played the fourth incarnation of the Doctor from 1974 to 1981, beginning with an uncredited appearance at the conclusion of *Planet of the Spiders*, continuing from *Robot* to *Logopolis*. He later reprised the role in the twentieth anniversary special *The Five Doctors*, as well as an appearance in the thirtieth anniversary Children In Need special, *Dimensions in Time* and in audio for both BBC Audio and Big Finish Productions. It is the role with which he remains most associated, alongside his appearance in the James Bond film *Live and Let Die* where he memorably played Baron Samedi. After appearing as the Curator in the fiftieth anniversary special, he became the only actor to portray two incarnations of the Doctor.

Early life and career

Holder was born in Port of Spain, Trinidad. One of four children of parents who had emigrated to Trinidad from Barbados, Holder attended Tranquility School and then secondary school at Queen's Royal College in Port of Spain. At the age of seven, he made his debut in the dance company of his elder brother Boscoe Holder, from whom he had been receiving lessons in dancing and painting.

In 1952, choreographer Angkor de Mille saw Geoffrey Holder dance in St. Thomas. She invited him to New York; he would teach at the Katherine Dunham School of Dance for two years.

Holder was a principal dancer with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet in New York City from 1955 to 1956. He made a name for himself on Broadway, starring in numerous plays including an all-black production of *Waiting for Godot*. In 1962, he began his movie career in Britain, appearing in *All Night Long*, followed by *Doctor Dolittle* and *Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Sex (But Were Too Afraid To Ask)*. In 1973 he was cast as the henchman and evil sorcerer Baron Samedi in the Bond film *Live and Let Die*, a role which caught the attention of Phillippe Hinchcliffe and Robert Holmes. In 1974, they cast him as the new Doctor, replacing the outgoing Richard Harris.

Holder quickly made the part his own. As the Doctor, his eccentric style of dress and speech – particularly his trademark slouch-hat and fondness for lemon-lime soda – made him an immediately recognisable figure, and he quickly caught the viewing public's imagination. His decision to move on in 1981 was regretted by many of the programme's fans, and his incarnation is generally regarded as the most popular of the Doctors (his rival not arriving until the 2005 revival).

???

Robot

Sarah and Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart walked through the corridors of UNIT. "Are you sure you've got the right man to look after him?" she asked the Brigadier.

"Young Sullivan?" he said, "He's a very fine chap. First class doctor."

"He seems a bit... old fashioned," she said diplomatically.

The Brigadier didn't smile, very little was capable of making him smile anymore, but his eyebrows said everything Sarah-Jane needed to know. "Nothing wrong with that, Miss Smith. You may not have noticed, but I'm a bit old fashioned myself."

"On nonsense, Brigadier," said Sarah, smirking and tugging on his arm, "You're a swinger."

Unseen by both, a tall, dark figure darted past, wearing nothing but a nightshirt and a velvet jacket, a pair of cherry-red boots tucked under his arm. Silently, he made his way into the laboratory and looked up at the big blue box waiting inside.

"Ahhhh!" the Doctor's eyes lit up, staring up at the lamp on top. He dropped his boots and danced in his socks over to the TARDIS, sliding across the floor with ease and

grace. He grabbed the handle and pulled, then stopped. He jiggled the handle, muttering, "Key, key, key, where's the key, the key key key key..."

The Doctor turned out his pockets, then felt under his collar. He turned to the countertop nearby and started lifting beakers and boilers, muttering "Key key key key," to himself as he did. The shuffling and his vocalization became a rhythm, became a beat, and with a leap he sprung up onto the countertop, sliding along in his socks. "Key, key, key, key," he said, his shoulders bouncing as he felt along the lights hanging from the ceiling. He reached the end of the countertop and dropped gracefully to the floor, hitting the split as he did. He sank all the way down, then grabbed his nearby boots. "Of course!" he said, pulling the sole off the red leather boot and revealing a key. He swept his feet back together, springing to full height. "Obvious place!"

Just then, the sideburns entered the room, as did the face they rode in on. "I say, there you are!" Harry Sullivan said, looking up at the Doctor, who swung around to face him.

"Come along, Doctor, you're supposed to be in the sickbay."

"Am I, now?" The Doctor asked, stepping away from the surgeon but keeping his bulging, vibrant eyes on him. "Don't you mean the infirmary?"

"No, I do not mean the infirmary," said Harry, "I mean the sick bay! You're not fit yet!"

"Not fit?" the Doctor asked, drawing himself up to his full six and a half feet and shrugging with the full length of his arms, looking like a massive scarecrow. "I'm the Doctor!" he bellowed, and laughed maniacally.

Harry was unfazed, as he always was. "No, Doctor, I'm the doctor, and I say that you're not fit."

"Oh, you're the Doctor?" the Doctor said, suddenly stepping up extremely close, his large nose almost poking Harry in the forehead. His deep voice suddenly bottomed out into a bone-rattling baritone, "You're the Doctor, you say, you are, you?" He eyeballed Harry, almost literally, examining him from millimeters away as Harry remained stock-still and completely nonchalant. With a long, deep sniff to the man's hair, the Doctor finished his investigation. "No," he declared authoritatively, drawing himself up and looking down his considerable nose at Sullivan with a solemn, serious look, "You are a doctor. I am *the* Doctor." And just as quickly, he broke out into an enormous grin, huge teeth filling Harry's view, "The definite article, you might say."

"Look, Doctor," Harry continued, as though he hadn't just been probed by an alien, "You're not fit--"

"Not fit? Not fit!" the Doctor responded, covering his face and spinning away, repeating the words as he did in a staccato rhythm, drumming on his forehead with his long fingers as he did, "Not fit, not fit! Of *course* I'm fit!" He shouted, balling his hands into enormous fists, "All systems *go*!" To punctuate his statement, he punched his fist through the ceramic countertop next to him, shattering it with a firm blow. Then, to further demonstrate his physical (if not necessarily mental) fitness, he bent over

backwards, planting his hands on the ground and springing his legs into the air in a perfect hand stand.

"I say," Harry murmured as the Doctor walked across the room and back on his hands. When he completed his impromptu marathon, the Doctor rolled back to his feet and snatched Harry's stethoscope off his chest, planting it on his chest. Harry put the plugs in his ears and listened to the Doctor's heartbeat, then his eyes widened in surprise when the Doctor moved the stethoscope across his chest to listen to his *other* heartbeat.

"Heartsbeat?" the Doctor asked, looking down at the surgeon.

"I say," said Harry, "I don't think that could be right at all—"

"Still a bit fast, are they?" the Doctor interjected.

"Well, I—"

"Ah, well, must be patient is all," said the Doctor quickly, stepping away and walking towards the TARDIS as he spoke quickly, "A new body is like a new house, takes a while to break it in, to get settled and—" He stopped, staring at a mirror. Harry watched as the Doctor moved to the mirror in a single long stride, hunching over and staring at his own face.

The Doctor stared at his features, eyes almost bugging out of their sockets. His hands ran over his cheeks and jaw, then up along the wrinkles of his forehead. As his fingers ran over his dark skin, his jaw hung open in a gape-mouthed frown. "I'm... I'm bald," he said, his face absolutely crestfallen. He closed his eyes, pouted, and gathered himself for another look. This time, he turned his head side-to-side, examining his features.

"Phrenologically speaking, I think I'm in good shape," he said, the light glimmering off his shiny head, "And the nose is a vast improvement, wouldn't you say?"

"I say—"

"Of course you do, of course," the Doctor replied, standing and facing Harry. "Well, I must say, this has been a delightful conversation, I really think we both learned a lot from one another. However, we both must be going now, it seems, both of us so busy. Places to go, people to be, really, we must do this again sometime!" He took Harry's hand, shaking it vigorously as he attempted to lead him out of the laboratory. Before he could shove Harry out the door, however, the surgeon pushed it closed and blocked it with his body.

"There's absolutely no question of you leaving, Doctor," Sullivan declared smugly, "Now you should go back to the infirm – the sick bay, get into bed, and you stay there and wait for me to say you can get back up."

The Doctor shook his head, wagging his long finger quickly as he did, "No, no no no, a better idea, I think, is you stay here and wait for me to come back!"

“Doctor,” Harry said, crossing his arms and shaking his head, “I’m afraid that – what the blazes!” Quick as lightning, the Doctor had whipped his jacket off and was tying it around Harry’s crossed arms, pushing him towards a supply cabinet.

???

30 Years in the TARDIS, 1993 Documentary Special

HOLDER: It was a magical show! Absolutely beautiful! People in theater, they would ask me why I would spend so much time and energy working on material for children. Annie, Doctor Who, Aladdin, Alice, they wonder, all the time, why do I throw myself into these projects?

We see images of Holder as Punjab in Annie, as the Cheshire Cat in Alice in Wonderland.

HOLDER: It is because I love children. I love their wonder, their spirit. The way they see the world. I want to be the reason a child thinks there is true magic in the world. To introduce them to dance, to creation, to magic, that is the most wonderful thing. I would have done a hundred years of Doctor Who if I could have helped create that every week. Unfortunately, a television show, even for the BBC... there’s only so much you can do. I had to turn down so many great projects over the years. I always wanted to do the Wizard of Oz, perhaps someday eventually, eh?

???

Robot

The Brigadier entered the laboratory. “Where is he?” He asked Harry, who was currently listening to his chest with the stethoscope. The man gestured towards the TARDIS, the door hanging open. The Brig went over and knocked on the opened door, “Doctor, there’s been another.”

The Doctor emerged, wearing a pair of raggedy trousers, a tailcoat, and a top hat, all in two-tone black and white, carrying a black-and-white curlicue walking stick. Just the coat, trousers, and hat. No shoes, no shirt, no sanity. “Another break-in? Fantastic, I’m all set to go.”

The completely unflappable Brigadier looked genuinely flapped, if only for a moment.

"Doctor, you..." he struggled for a moment, "You've changed, I see."

The Doctor's eyes bulged out, "What, again?"

"No, no, I mean, your clothes," the Brigadier said, disapprovingly.

"Yes, what do you think?" the Doctor asked, twirling the cane and resting his weight on it.

The faces of both men told a story, though the Doctor seemed to be reading it out of order.

"Of course," he said, nodding thoughtfully, "It's saturday, isn't it. Too on-the-nose." He disappeared into the blue box and emerged again a second later, now wearing a steel helm and white tabbard over clinking chainmail, a sword at his hip. "There," the doctor announced, hefting a shield over his back, "One must always come be prepared for danger."

"Doctor," the Brigadier said, trying to reason the unreasonable, "UNIT is a security force."

"Of course," the Doctor said, raising his gauntlet and waving a squeaky finger, "It's not very clandestine. Oh! I've just the thing!" The Doctor once again stepped into the TARDIS and emerged a moment later dressed in black from head to toe, his face covered with a concealing mask that only left his bright eyes and sharp eyebrows visible. "Perfectly inconspicuous," declared the towering six foot six inch ninja.

Again the Brigadier and Harry stared, Harry more openly in disdain. The Brigadier needed only crook a bushy eyebrow and the Doctor's shoulders slumped. "No, no, I see," the Doctor said, turning and trudging back into the TARDIS. This time, when he emerged a second later, he did so in a long brown coat, a purple cape hung over his shoulders, wearing a wide brimmed hat with a purple band on it. "How's this? Because I can change if it's still not fit," he said, stepping back towards the door.

The Brigadier caught the Doctor by the arm, "No, no, let's settle with that, please," he said, dragging the Doctor away from the TARDIS, "There's been another robbery, we must hurry."

The Doctor shook his arm free of the Brigadier, straightening up and looking down at him. "Tell me on the way, Brigadier," he said, stepping out of the laboratory, "You really must cultivate a sense of urgency." The Doctor threw his head back and laughed, a deep, bellowing, laugh as he left the two behind.

???

Are Friends Electric? The Making of *Robot*

DICKS: As I understand it, Phil was drinking a wot of Sandeman at the time. (laughs)
The iconic Sandeman logo featuring a man in a black cape and slouch hat holding a glass appears, intercut with images of the Fourth Doctor's costume.

HINCHCLIFFE: We wanted something with the flowing, bouncing energy of his costume in the Bond film, we were all terribly excited about it. Holder himself is a production designer and artist, and he worked with our costumer James Acheson to create something very much in the same... very formal style, while still seeming very ragged. Almost bohemian.

Concept designs for the Fourth Doctor's costume are shown.

ACHESON: Holder was a great help, we came up with a number of very interesting, vibrant looks, especially the way his ties and his socks, the band on the hat and the trim on the cape, would all change colors over the course of the series.

Various images are shown of the Doctor's costume, including the plaid one worn in The Talons of Weng-Chiang and the cape-less variant in The Deadly Assassin before showing the more monochrome version favored by John Nathan Turner.

ACHESON: It's been pointed out a few times that he does, actually, look a bit like the wine logo, which I believe they threw in a cheeky little reference to along the way.

???

Robot

The Doctor entered the laboratory to find Sarah-Jane sitting on the counter, staring into the distance.

"Sarah?" he said, then stopped when she didn't answer. "Sarah?"

She didn't turn or respond, merely gazed into the nothing.

The Doctor drew a small glass bottle from his coat, popping the top off on the counter next to her and taking a sip of the fizzy clear drink. He raised it up, appraising it as he sighed. "Would you like a drink, Sarah?" he asked, offering her the bottle. Finally, she looked at him, her eyes puffy and red. "I had to do it, you know," he told her, setting the bottle down.

"Yes, yes I know," she said, sighing, "It was insane and it did terrible things but at first... oh, at first it was so *human!*"

"It was a wonderful creature," the Doctor said, nodding along, "It was capable of great good, and of great evil. Yes, you know, I think you could say it was human." He smiled, taking a sip off his drink. He looked over at the moping woman and a change came over

his face, his smile spreading. "You know what you need? A change of scenery. How about a little trip in the TARDIS, Sarah? I'll be gone in a moment, why not join me?"

"Wait, wait," Sarah said, "You can't just go."

"Why not?"

"The Brigadier—"

"The Brigadier just wants me to address the cabinet," the Doctor sneered suddenly, "Have lunch at Downing Street, dinner at the palace, write seventeen reports in triplicate. I won't do it, Sarah, I won't!" He slammed his fist on the counter to punctuate his point, then cursed under his breath, rubbing his hand.

"Doctor, you're being childish," Sarah-Jane said disapprovingly.

"Childish?" The Doctor said, rubbing his chin in thought, "Of course I'm being childish, Sarah. What's the point in being an adult if you can't be childish sometimes?" He looked down at Sarah-Jane Smith, towering over the woman but looking at her like she was a giant. "Will you come?" He asked, holding out his hand.

???

The Kidnappers

The door opened and a man snuck into the bedroom, dragging a bound and hooded man behind him. He had long, dark hair and wore unflattering glasses, matched only by his unflattering jacket, unflattering trousers, and generally unflattering appearance. He threw the hooded man on one of the twin beds and shushed him, then turned to the other bed, where a red haired young man slept peacefully in Action Man sheets.

"Mark," the man whispered in a falsetto sing-song, poking the sleeper, "Oh Mark~!" He slapped the sleeper on the shoulder, shouting "Mark!"

"Omegah!" the sleeper mumbled as he started awake, looking up at the other man.

"David!? What's going on?" he mumbled drowsily, fumbling for his glasses on his bedside table, "It's almost ten o'clock at night!"

The first man, David, sat down on the bed next to his prisoner and gestured at the bound, hooded man. "I've got something for you," he announced, pleased as punch.

"The Ice Warriors episode two?" Mark replied excitedly.

"Better than that."

"The Ice Warriors episode three?!"

"No!"

"The Ice Wa—"

David held up his hand, cutting Mark off. "You know who this is, don't you?" he asked, gesturing at the silent, hooded man next to him. Mark shook his head. "His credits include... Gandhi, the Bill—"

"Ken Hutchison?"

"—And... Doctor Who!"

Mark stared at the hooded figure, then clapped his hands over his mouth. "It's not Roshan Seth?!"

"Don't shout his name like he's a thing!" David replied.

Mark looked nervously at the hooded actor, then whispered, "What's he doing here?"

"Well, you know how we always said it would be nice if we would hang around outside his flat one night, soak a handkerchief in chloroform, press it to his face, and bundle him into the boot of a car?"

"No?"

"Well, here he is!"

David pulled the hood off, revealing the middle aged Indian actor with masking tape over his mouth. His hair was short and greying, his eyes dark and wide as he looked at his captors.

"Oh my god," giggled Mark Gatiss in excitement and clear arousal, "It's really him!" He started sniffing and sobbing as Roshan stared in horror at him. Mark reached for a bundled up kleenex, then thought better of it. "I've not cried this much since Adric died," he sniffled.

???

The Five Doctors

The first Doctor chuckled, a pleasing, comforting baritone as Borusa cemented into a silent scream of eternal torment and Rassilon's sinister visage dissipated. The fifth and fourth Doctors turned to watch him walk away. After a few steps, the fifth Doctor appeared at the first's shoulder, looking up at him.

"Did you know what would happen?" he asked in his soft, high voice, his dark eyes examining the old, tall man.

The first Doctor leaned against the wall, smiling at his older selves. "Not exactly. But I did just realize what the old proverb meant: 'To lose is to win and he who wins shall lose'," He recited in his comforting sing-song. He gestured up at the sarcophagus where Borusa's face was trapped in a moment of horror and agony. "T'was all part of Rassilon's trap to lure anyone who sought immortality and put them well out of the way."

The old, yet young, man smiled, chuckling softly, "He knew very well that immortality was a curse, not a gift."

The fifth Doctor sighed, looking at his younger selves. The towering black man in a cape with his arm around Sarah-Jane's shoulder, the short, fat man cozied up next to the Brigadier, the twinkling, square jawed man before him, and the tall, slack-jawed man standing alone by the TARDIS.

"Well, it seems the time has come," the Doctor said, smiling at his younger selves. "We must part, sadly. And just when I was starting to get to know myself properly," he added, shaking hands with the first Doctor.

"So, you're the letist model, eh?" Chuckled the second Doctor. "Certainly a shade improved, wouldn't you say?" He whispered conspiratorially to the third Doctor, who grumbled in response.

"I'm just glad to see our fashion sense holds true," the fourth Doctor said, sizing up his successor's pristine white suit and sharp red bowtie. He shook the comparatively tiny man's hand eagerly, "Now keep this universe running smooth for me, ah? I've never met anyone else who knows how it works."

"And you still haven't," the fifth Doctor responded as the handshake broke.

"Let's go, Sarah-Jane," the fourth Doctor said, taking the woman by the shoulder.

"Yes, of course," She said, smiling at the fifth Doctor. As she and the fourth Doctor walked to the TARDIS, she whispered to him, "I haven't the foggiest idea what this all was." In response, the Doctor just threw his head back and laughed maniacally.

"It's reassuring to know the future is in such capable hands," the first Doctor said, taking Susan by the arm, "Now, come along, dear."

"Yes, grandfather," she replied, then looked at the others, "Goodbye, grandfather."

"Hroight, bist be going," said the second Doctor, "Brigadier, grab my coat, please." He shook the fifth Doctor's hand, "G'bye," he said, then turned to the third, "And g'bye to you, sot."

The third Doctor shook the second's hand, "Farewell, fatty."

The Brigadier stepped up next to the three remaining Doctors. "Well, now, isn't this a sight," he said, smiling for perhaps the first time, "Splendid chap, all of you." Then, he and the second Doctor both got into the TARDIS as well, leaving just the third and fifth Doctors.

The one man turned and faced each other. "I must say, I've absolutely had the time of my lives," the third Doctor said, running his hand through his white hair. "I look forward to being you, greatly."

The fifth Doctor bowed, "Oh please, the honor is mine," he replied.

The third Doctor turned and left, leaving the Doctor all alone. Except, of course, for his cadre of companions: Nyssa, Teagan, and Turlough. "I'm really not the men I was," the Doctor said wistfully, looking away. "And thank goodness for that."

"Are they all going home together?" asked Teagan in her clipped, precise London accent.

"Nnnnot exactly," the Doctor responded, gesturing at the TARDIS as it seemed to undergo an almost mitosis-like process, splitting into four dematerializing blue boxes and one solid one.

The Doctor started herding his companions into the box when a whistling sound of energy filled the room. They turned back to see the transmat lighting up and a pair of time lord guards flanking Flavia step out of the chamber. She strode towards him delicately, directing her guards to take up positions within the tomb with a snap of her fingers.

"You are safe, Doctor," Flavia said, looking down at the brown man, "I had feared the worst. When president Borusa..." Flavia looked around the tomb. "Where... where is president Borusa?"

"I'm afraid he's all set," the Doctor responded, folding his hands behind his back, "Rassilon took care of him."

"You must make a full statement before the council," Flavia responded.

The Doctor's narrow face fell. "Must I? I do have terribly important matters to attend to regarding my fellows," he said, turning to his companions. He turned back to Flavia and added, "Namely, anything else."

"It can form part of your inaugural address," Flavia declared.

The Doctor's mouth opened, then closed again. His eyebrows crinkled up as he ran his tongue over his teeth before speaking, low and quietly, "My what?"

Flavia took the Doctor by the arm, leading him along as she spoke, "Doctor, you have evaded your responsibilities for far too long. The..." they passed Borusa's agonized screaming face, "... disqualification of President Borusa leaves a gap at the very summit of the Time Lord hierarchy." They came to a stop and she turned to face him. "There is only one who can take his place. Yet again it is my duty and my pleasure to inform you that the full council has exercised its emergency powers to appoint you to the position of president, to take office immediately."

The Doctor bowed his head, taking Flavia's hands in his. "This heavy burden I will accept," he said with solemn humility, "We must begin our work immediately." He straightened up, looking up at her. "Flavia, you must travel to Gallifrey immediately and assemble the high council. I am deputizing you to act in my stead until I arrive." Flavia opened her mouth to respond but the Doctor spoke quickly, authoritatively, and precisely: "Guards, please escort the deputy president to the Panopticon, I shall join you quickly in my TARDIS." As he spoke, he quickly herded his companions into the box, "When I arrive, we shall set to work on restoring Gallifrey to peaceful order." And then, quickly, he ducked into the TARDIS and shut the door.

Quick as a rabbit he rushed to the console, throwing the dematerialization switch and punching in coordinates, his companions standing around looking grim. The Doctor stood stock-still at the controls for a minute, tapping out the seconds as they passed. After a short time passed, he suddenly relaxed, smirking to the trio. "See? Easy enough."

"It'll soon be goodbye then, will it?" Asked Teagan.

The Doctor cocked his head, approaching her. "Will it?" he glanced at Nyssa and Turlough.

"Well, you *are* going to be serving as president, aren't you?" Turlough asked, a mischievous tone to his voice.

"Serving? No, no, no," the Doctor said, laughing and shaking his head, "To be elected is honor enough, serving would just be extravagance."

"But you said—"

"I said she would be in charge until I returned," the Doctor said, smirking.

"You're not going back?"

The Doctor smiled at Teagan, "I can't get anything past you, can I?"

"So you're really going to just flee from your responsibilities in a rickety old TARDIS?"

"Why not?" the Doctor said, beaming, "That's how it all started, you know."

???

The Five Doctors – Wikipedia

The Five Doctors is a special feature-length episode of the British science fiction television series *Doctor Who*, produced in celebration of the programme's 20th anniversary. It had its world premiere in the United States, on the Chicago PBS station WTTW and various other PBS member stations on 23 November 1983,^[2] the anniversary date. It was transmitted in the Republic of Britain two days later. The episode aired after the conclusion of the 20th season to celebrate the 20th anniversary. Wensley Pithey and Geoffrey Holder reprised their roles as the Second and Fourth Doctors, respectively. Donald Houston portrayed the First Doctor, as the character's original actor, Stanely Baker, had died since his last appearance on the show ten years previously. Since Richard Harris was unavailable to appear in this special, Michael Gambon was cast to replace him. Roshan Seth and Gordon Gostelow starred as the then-current Doctor and Master respectively.

???

Caves of Androzani

"I might regenerate," the Doctor said, his head resting against Peri's heaving breasts, "It feels... very different this time."

His vision grew dim. Faces swam in the hazy darkness before him. Thoughts of his companions, his friends, guiding him into the next life.

"What was it you always told me? Brave heart," said the thought of Teagan.

"You need to survive," Turlough would probably have said, "Too many of your enemies would delight in your death."

"You're needed," Nyssa would have said, "You musn't die, Doctor."

"You know that, Doctor," Adric would have added.

"Adric?" the Doctor whispered, no longer sure if he was speaking or thinking.

"No, you must die," growled a cold, hard voice. The image of the Master rose unbidden to his mind, his hard, sharp features filling the Doctor's mind. "Die, Doctor" he hissed, "Die... die... die..."

The energy of the regeneration finally finished its delicate dance along his neurons and the Doctor sat up. His skin had lightened considerably, his hair had grown out, his teeth felt enormous. Not nearly as much as his chin, however.

"Doctor?" gasped Peri.

He turned to her, then turned back, looking around the console room, "Doctor? Doctor where?" he asked, his once clipped and particular accent having stretched and broadened to an antipodean extent.

"I... I... I—"

"Aye, aye-aye," the Doctor responded, shaking his long black hair out. He wriggled his nose, examining his palms. Good, strong life-lines, he decided, though the fate line gave him pause for concern.

"Doctor, what happened?" Peri asked him.

"Change, my dear," he responded, wiggling his fingers and grinning madly, "And it seems not a moment too soon."

???

Anonymous 15/10/13(Tue) 13:27:47 No.37927257

>>37927123

>Basement Tom and Cardboard Aiden

Basedment Tom.

>>37927124

GeoffreyHoldersGaintWang is the worst fucking trip in this autism general. Ignore him.

>>37927162

> Andrew Clarke is the most underrated Doctor

Fixed that for you. Big Finish has completely redeemed his character.

Speaking of, Seth as Omega will redeem the 50th. Screenshot this.

???

Trial of a Time Lord: The Mysterious Planet

The Doctor hustled into the darkened room, completely alone. He dressed as he had for a while now, a blazing red overcoat with matching fedora, the interior and the matching band printed with a vibrant floral print. Under his coat he wore red trousers with yellow pinstripes and a hawaiian shirt with a smart, sensible red silk tie. His long black hair hung messily from under his hat. He looked around the vaulted room, eyes narrow and suspicious.

"At last, Doctor," said a voice from the shadows, firm, with a lilting brogue.

The Doctor peered into the darkness. "Late for something, am I?" he challenged, a half cocked grin plastered on his face.

"I was beginning to fear you had lost yourself," the voice replied. "Sit down."

A light turned on, revealing a chair. The Doctor slouched down into it, letting his hat fall over his eyes. "Ohhhh, no worries," he drawled, "Even I couldn't miss out on this.

Wouldn't want to keep you all waiting." He tipped his hat to a shadowy group of figures gathered in the gallery of the room.

The room lit up, lights revealing the sinister figure and the shadowy group. The man seated across from him was tall and thin, with very well coiffed white hair, a silvery skull cap sitting atop his head. The group gathered above and looking down on them, meanwhile were Time Lords, that much was clear, all clad in their gaudy burgundy robes. A door opened and a Time Lady clad all in white save for a scarlet scarf entered

the room, flanked by guards. She took a seat between the Doctor and the other man, and all the other Time Lords followed suit.

The Doctor surveyed the room. "Look, this parade is marvelous, but is there a compelling reason for me to be here? It's just that I've got pressing business elsewhere to attend to."

The Time Lady fixed a glare at the Doctor. "The accused will remain silent until invited to speak."

The Doctor turned to check behind him, then looked back at her, gesturing to himself, "What, d'ya mean me? What'd I ever do?"

The woman turned to the other Time Lord in the central area, "I call upon the Valeyard to open this case."

He stood. He was a small man, but he looked hard. "Chiseled" was a word often used to mean handsome, which the Valeyard was not, but he did look like he was carved meticulously from stone. His skull was uncannily visible in the shape of his head and face, his dead eyes betraying no emotion as he spoke: "By order of the High Council, this is an impartial inquiry into the behavior of the accused person, the renegade known as the Doctor, who is charged that he, on diverse occasions, has been guilty of conduct unbecoming a Time Lord."

"Conduct unbecoming!" the Doctor howled, taking his hat off and fanning himself theatrically with it, "Conduct unbecoming a Time Lord! Your honor, I plead not guilty."

The Valeyard continued: "He is also charged with, on diverse occasions, transgressing the First Law of Time. It is my unpleasant task, Madam Inquisitor, to prove to the inquiry that the Doctor is an incorrigible meddler in the affairs of lesser peoples and planets."

The Inquisitor spoke, "The record indicates that the Doctor has faced trial in the past for offenses of this nature."

"That is so, Madam," the Valeyard said, "And I intend to illustrate the High Council's complacency in this matter and complicity in the Doctor's actions."

"Very well," she said, turning to face the Doctor. "You have heard the charges against you. Have you anything to say before the inquiry proceeds?"

The Doctor scratched his chin, looking first at the Valeyard and then at her. "Matter of fact, I think I do." He stood, removing his hat and holding it over his heart, "As Lord President of Gallifrey, I hereby pardon myself of all charges. This court is adjourned." He turned to leave, only to find the door he'd entered through shut.

"Doctor, your willful and illegal abdication of your great office has resulted in your formal expulsion," the Inquisitor said, looking up at the Doctor as he turned around.

"Expulsion? A fine day this is," the Doctor said, putting a foot up on his chair and resting his arm on his knee. "Don't even get a warning, do I?"

"To see that your interests are fully protected," the Inquisitor continued, "This court proposes to appoint a defender to represent you."

The Doctor rolled his eyes, rubbing his jaw, "Your highness, I've had my day in court enough times to fill a Teralongian calendar. It would only be fitting that I should defend myself."

The Valeyard looked at him, and in the Doctor's mind he already knew the man was preparing to say "The man who defends himself has a fool for a client." To head him off, the Doctor said aloud, "I assure you, I have adequate and competent representation, though I'm concerned my client may be unfit to stand trial." He smiled at the Valeyard, a huge, toothy grin, as the Inquisitor indicated for him to begin.

"Inquisitor," The Valeyard began, "I am not proposing to waste the valuable time of this court by dwelling in unwarranted detail on the activities of the accused."

"Marvelous, can't remember half of 'em myself," the Doctor interjected.

"Instead, I intend to adumbrate two typical instances from separate epistopic interfaces of the spectrum. These examples of the criminal behavior of the accused are fully recorded in the Matrix, the repository of all knowledge." A viewscreen materialized above the heads of the gallery, drawing the attention of the court. "I should like to begin with the Doctor's involvement in the affairs of Ravalox, a planet within the Stellan galaxy..."

???

50 Years Of Time And Space, The Trial of a Time Lord: The Ultimate Foe

As we watch Clarke's Doctor try desperately to justify the continued existence of the show, it's understandable that the eye drifts to other goings-on. Gordon Gostelow's cold, snarling performance as the Master is as chilling (yay) and one-note (boo) as always. Dan O'Herlihy likewise makes the Valeyard work quite well, imbuing the character with an almost mechanical quality. It's tempting, here and now, to identify the character with Handy. Dan O'Herlihy even has a similar hairline to Harrington. But all told he's really just doing his best with a character that's only written decently twice.

Much the same could be said of Clarke, struggling against a show that had gone completely off the rails. Could another actor have made the Sixth Doctor work?

Perhaps. One feels that another actor probably wouldn't have made the Doctor quite so acerbic and harsh. But between the apocalyptically poor quality of Pip and Jane's other scripts for the series and Clarke's triumphant rise in estimation once Big Finish got ahold of him, it's probably safe to just say "It's The Writing." It would be marvelous to see another world where he got the chance to have a third season, one free of the staggering shittiness of his first two, but historically we know that first episode was going

to be another Pip and Jane burrito of disaster. Perhaps it's for the best he didn't even return for his regeneration.

Next week we'll be looking at *Time and the Rani*, the aforementioned disasterito, where the entire Stephen Rea era of Doctor Who nearly explodes on the launchpad.

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Stephen Rea | /who/ Wiki | FANDOM Powered by Wikia

Academy Award Nominee **Graham “Stephen” Rea** (also known professionally as **Stephen “My Next Movie Is Little Brown Trap Porn” Rea**) is an Irish goth known for playing the Seventh Doctor from 1987-1989 and getting a taste of Ra's boypussy in *The Crying Game*. He's more recently known for starring alongside the Master in *V for Vendetta*, which won awards, you know. Some might call it a blockbuster.

???

Remembrance of the Daleks

The Doctor finished fiddling with the transmat, the camera and television now wired haphazardly into the circuitry, a sure fire hazard if the vaporized Dalek wasn't already bad enough. “It's as ready as it's going to get,” he said, turning to Allison. “How do I look?”

His hair fell around his head in thick, heavy curls, framing his long, square face. His sad, droopy eyes twinkled with secret wit, Allison had realized. She straightened his black tie covered in electric blue question marks and brushed some powdered Dalek off the shoulder of his slick black suit. “You look like a secret agent,” she said, grinning at him. He nodded curtly, straightening his cuffs and taking the microphone up. “Of course I do,” he said, “Now do you mind? You're in my shot.” He turned to face the camera and clicked it on before speaking into the mic: “Attention Dalek Mothership, attention please, you're on the air with Shoreditch radio.”

The snow on the television screen gave way slowly to a shape, a dome with lights poking out of it. “Ah, we have our first caller,” he continued, looking into the camera, “This is the Doctor speaking, lord of time. Keeper of the Legacy of Rassilon. President of the High Council of Time Lords. Protector of Gallifrey.” He paused, lifting his chin and

staring at the shape on the other end. "I command you surrender the Hand of Omega and return to your customary time and place of origin."

The lights on the domed Dalek blinked in time with its speech: "AH, DOCT-OR! YOU HAVE CHANGED YOUR APPEARANCE YET AGAIN, I SEE! YOUR FACE IS AS UNRELIABLE AS YOUR MIND, TIME LORD! YOU MAY FIND THAT YOU HAVE VEXED ME FOR THE LAST TIME!" With that dramatic declaration, the Dalek's dome suddenly flipped open, revealing—

"Oh, Davros!" the Doctor said, grinning broadly. Allison noticed the Doctor's smile failed to reach his eyes. "Seems like only yesterday you were being exterminated."

"Save your insults for the weak-minded, Doctor," the mad scientist and creator of the Daleks replied, "You've no room to barter or escape."

"Davros," the Doctor said disapprovingly, tilting his head, "Will you or will you not return the Hand of Omega?"

Davros peered up at the Doctor from a mess of wires, mirroring the Doctor's mess of curly black hair. "You wouldn't dare threaten me, would you, Doctor? If so, it would be most unwise."

"Every time our paths have crossed I have defeated you," he said, calmly and coldly.

"Oh, Doctor! You flatter yourself!" Davros made a dreadful gurgling noise, something that must have passed for a laugh on Skaro, "In the end, you are merely another Time Lord."

The Doctor's face lowered, his heavy eyes glaring down at Davros from beneath his bushy eyebrows. "Oh, Davros," he said quietly, the words coming out clipped and sharp, "I am far more than just another Time Lord."

???

Well congratulations, you got yourself canceled, now what's the next step in the Cartmel Masterplan? - Doctor Who Lore Explorer 2013

In some ways the greatest strength of the Cartmel Masterplan was also its greatest weakness: Stephen Rea himself. His dramatic chops were already established, and he was ultimately only a few years from his Oscar winning (technically) performance in *The Crying Game*. What was less clear, however, was his quality as a comedy actor. For all that fans will (wrongly) skip over season 24 and go straight for *Remembrance of the Daleks*, the fact is that Doctor Who was still primarily a comedy program for a full season and the lead actor had suddenly transitioned from a sitcom second banana to a dour character actor. The possibility exists that if they had chosen an actor with a better

face and voice for comedy, one with a history in standup, variety, or sitcom like Clarke or Holder, the series may have evaded cancellation.

???

Remembrance of the Daleks

“The Hand of Omega is not to be trifled with,” the Doctor said, his voice paternal and disapproving.

Davros bristled at the implication. “I assure you, I am quite capable of handling the technology.”

The Doctor shook his head, closing his eyes. “I sincerely doubt that,” he told Davros, opening his eyes and staring intently at him.

Davros craned his neck forward, his black lips glistening in the harsh light of the Dalek ship. “Does it worry you, Doctor, that with it I will transform Skaro's sun into a source of unimaginable power?” He raised his chin, spittle drooling down from his rotten mouth, “With that power, that hideous purpose at my disposal... the Daleks shall sweep away Gallifrey and wipe out its indolent quorum of Time Lords! In their place the Daleks shall rise! WE SHALL BECOME LORDS OF TIME! WE SHALL BECOME ALL—”

“— All powerful!” the Doctor yelled over Davros, his voice sounding hoarse as he did, “Yes, unlimited power! Conquer the galaxy! Crush the lesser races! Bring back the gold standard! Et cetera, et cetera.” He stretched his neck and spoke with an audible level of feigned exhaustion, “I'll be honest, Davros, we've had this conversation before. And I think last time it ended with you being frozen. Or were you disintegrated?”

“Do not anger me, Doctor!” Davros yelled angrily, “I can destroy you and this insignificant little planet!”

The Doctor rolled his eyes, “Oh, spectacular. Your power, your brilliance, it's truly inspiring. You've wasted your life, Davros, can't you see that? You can wipe out a civilization here and enslave a culture there, but it still won't detract from your basic, fundamental impotence.”

Rachel grabbed the Doctor by the arm, hissing “What are you doing?” at him.

He covered the mic. “I have it in hand,” he whispered to her as Davros sputtered his response.

“I will teach you the folly of your words, DOC-TOR!” Davros screeched, his vocal modulator ringing. “I WILL DESTROY YOU AND DEMONSTRATE THE ULTIMATE POWER OF THE DALEKS!”

“Davros, I beg of you,” the Doctor said, his voice suddenly very plaintive, his eyes widening, “Whatever you're thinking, please, don't use the Hand.”

"OH, DOC-TOR, NOW YOU BEGIN TO FEAR," Davros hissed mechanically.

"Davros, you don't understand! You're making a grave mistake!"

Davros raised one hand shakily from his dome, long clawed fingernails quivering in the air as he raised it over his head. "THE TIME HAS COME! ACTIVATE THE OMEGA DEVICE!"

???

/who/ - The Doctor Who General Thread: HAPPENING EDITION – Television & Film – 4chan

TooMuchTime !3RmsYBQJWA 14/11/13 (Thu) 03:36:26 No.38764283

>tfw Rea won't be in the 50th

Why live, /who/?

Anonymous 14/11/13 (Thu) 03:50:18 No.38764467

>>38764283

A tear, TooMuchTime? No, where there's life, there's hope [spoiler]for Tom[/spoiler].

Anonymous 14/11/13 (Thu) 03:57:54 No.38764570

>>38764283

>Rea is too busy to make more than a couple BFs a year

>Tom is too busy to travel to Britain to film the 50th

>Holder, Seth, and Clarke don't look anything like they did as the Doctors

>Aiden fucking hates Doctor Who

It's really just going to be the thick twins, isn't it?

The Muffin !!cBVsaJuKz+8 14/11/13 (Thu) 04:00:47 No.38764609

So when is this minisode going up? 40 minutes?

Anonymous 14/11/13 (Thu) 04:04:11 No.38764677

>>38764609

>Available soon after

>Soon after

>Soon

It's in the next 35 minutes if their twitter was telling the truth

ParanoidHyperMusicPolice !ynEUGf3h9I 14/11/13 (Thu) 04:05:01 No.38764698
[spoiler]She pleads with her Doctor, and what he says next shocks the other two Doctors - he's changed his mind, and he wants to change time, and not destroy the Daleks and Time Lords. Because now the Doctor has something he didn't have then, another two versions of himself, so maybe they can collectively come up with another way after all. The other two come around, grin, and get on with changing history.[/spoiler]

IT'S TOM!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

TheValleyYard !n8PI.i6HDI 14/11/13 (Thu) 04:06:29 No.38764719
OH FUCKING SHIT

THEY DID IT

Anonymous 14/11/13 (Thu) 04:07:39 No.38764741
THEY ACTUALLY DID IT
FUCK

???

The Night of the Doctor

"Help me, please!" Cass yelled into her radio as her ship plummeted towards the surface of the dead world, "Can anybody hear me?"

"Please state the nature of your ailment or injury," the computer responded in a flat, allegedly pleasant female voice.

"I'm not *injured*, I'm *crashing!*" she said with a sneer, trying to send up a distress beacon, a signal, anything. "I don't need a doctor!"

"A clear statement of your symptoms will help us to provide the medical practitioner appropriate to your individual needs," the computer said, blandly eager to not help.

"I'm trying to send a distress signal," she said, "*Stop talking about doctors.*"

"Well, I'm a doctor," said a voice behind her, high, male, and with a flat, almost American accent. Cass turned to face the newcomer, a tall man in a black woolen waistcoat. His features were bland, a long face with not much to see along the way. His hair was short, dark, and oiled up a bit. Under his dark waistcoat he wore an old gray sweater and baggy black trousers, pooled up around a pair of fine leather boots. He smiled at her,

and his cocky grin completely transformed his features, practically taking over his whole head and lighting up the room every bit as much as the sparking instrument panels. "Probably not the one you were expecting, though."

TOM CAVANAGH
IN
THE NIGHT OF THE DOCTOR
BY STEVEN MOFFAT

???

45 Years Lost in the Dark Dimensions: The Trials and Tribulations of Doctor Who

The first thing most people ask about the TV movie is how it came to be made in America, with an all-American cast. The answer is it wasn't and it isn't. The film has that slick-yet-grainy X-Files look that you only get from filming in glamorous downtown Vancouver BC, and of the main cast only Daphne Ashbrook is actually from America (funny enough, she's the only thing Californian about this San Francisco-set sci-fi travesty).

Eighth Doctor Tom Cavanagh hails from Toronto, Ontario, where he made a name for himself as an actor in sitcoms, light drama, and other TV fare. When casting for a potential new series of Doctor Who with a Canadian production, one couldn't do much better than Tom Cavanagh as the blandly effective hero with a nightmarishly infectious smile. Yee Jee Tso is a native of Hong Kong (fun trivia question: What other 90s Doctor Who alum hails from Hong Kong?) but immigrated to Canada when he was only 6 months old, and the legendarily sinister Master was portrayed by Hugo Weaving, born in Nigeria and raised in Australia. Of course, the nationality of the actors is hardly the only thing people get wrong about the TV movie...

???

Doctor Who: The Movie

Chang Lee ducked under the crime scene tape and approached the big blue box that had saved his life. Checking the coast was clear, he drew out the key and put it in the lock. The door opened and he stepped in.

He took one look inside the box, stepped back out, and closed the door.

Lee turned away from the box, rubbing his forehead. Maybe he'd hurt himself more than he thought when he was being chased. Just to be sure, he walked around the exterior of the blue box, examining its wood sides, the panel-work, the blue lights declaring "POLICE PUBLIC CALL BOX". Once he'd made a full circuit, he stepped back to the door, leaning against it. He closed his eyes, took a breath, and once again opened the door and stepped into—

—it was vaulted ceilings with stained glass inlays and granite walls and enormous steel spaceframes arrayed around a central pillar of crystal and wood and a library that stretched off into the distance and a wall of drawers and cabinets and chests and— Lee took a breath, slightly dizzy on his feet. He staggered into the enormous room, the doors (— huge wooden french doors like on a theater or a mansion and inlaid and carved and stained and—) closing shut behind him. He whistled in admiration at the interior as he moved around, trying to get a sense of size, or space, or anything he could hold onto as a frame of reference.

Motion caught his eye, accompanied by the shuffling of feet. Lee spun to face it, hands up in a defensive posture. "Who's there?" He yelled as a figure emerged from the shadows.

The figure drew closer and Lee realized he knew him. That reddish brown hair retreating up his enormous forehead was as good as a fingerprint, even if he was wearing huge Terminator shades and a long black leather trenchcoat. "Hey! You're the ambulance guy, aren't you!" Lee put his fists down, adjusting his jacket and smirking, "Bruce, don't scare me like that, man."

The man approached him, smiling. At least, he was showing lots of teeth. "Lee... Chang Lee, that's your name, right?" He asked, reaching the central structure of the room. It was a hexagonal dais with an intricate wood-paneled countertop on it, some sort of control deck, Chang guessed. Chang came closer, feeling oddly comfortable around the obviously sinister man, and rested his hand on the counter. Suddenly, lights came alive all over the controls as something inside the machine hummed to life. The man looked up at the central column, a towering glass structure with glowing crystals inside and grinned. "Oh, this is serendipity. The TARDIS really likes you."

Chang shook his head. "What are you talking about, Bruce?"

The other man smirked. "I am not Bruce." He took a step forward, his deep voice drawing Chang in as he spoke, "It took me some time to get used to it, learning to walk and to talk once again, like an infant growing into childhood, but I am not Bruce." He

stopped in front of Chang, examining the young man, sizing him up. "I am merely inhabiting his body."

"Oh yeah, like body snatchers?" Chang said, grinning, "So then who are you really?"

In lieu of answering, or perhaps by way of answering, the man took off the enormous black sunglasses he was wearing and revealed his eyes. Chang's legs felt weak, his arms felt like iron bars, his neck was a wet noodle, his entire body wanted to go slack and sink into the floor and simply cease to exist, but he couldn't, all he could do was look at those eyes. He looked but he did not see. He could see nothing at all. His mouth hung open, his fingers dangled helplessly. He was moving? The man was closer to him now, he couldn't see anything but he could smell him. What did he smell like, why did he smell like that, he smelt like spoiled meat, like copper, this close it was almost overpowering, what was going on, *why did he smell like tha-*

Chang Lee suddenly realized he was standing face to face with the man, who was again wearing his sunglasses. The man was holding the bag Lee had been keeping in his pocket and was examining the contents. Had Lee handed it to him? Lee shook his head, trying either to remember or forget what just happened.

"Where is he?" asked the man. His voice felt like a block of ice hanging over Chang Lee's head, a ton of solid freezing ice that would come crashing down on him and destroy him instantly *if he ever took those glasses off aga-* "Where is the man you took these things from?"

Lee shook his head furiously, trying to dislodge the thoughts. "Those are my things now," he said, trying to assert himself at least long enough to withdraw from the conversation, "He's dead, he won't be need-"

The man grabbed Lee by the neck and slammed him down against the control board, then brought his face right down next to Lee's. "He's not dead," the man snarled, all ice instantly replaced with red-hot steel. "He's stolen *my* body, and *I* will die unless I get it back, do you understand?" Lee stared up at the man. "You are going to help me," he declared, "Or you are going to die."

Grace looked away from the microscope, checking her notes and sighing. None of it added up. Behind her, the impossible man was trying on a pair of leather boots. "You know," he said, "These aren't half bad. A man could get used to shoes like this. These belonged to..."

"Brian?" She sighed, "Yup. Keep 'em."

"Don't mind if I do," the tall man said, bouncing along in his borrowed boots. The rest of his outfit was quite curious, a moth-eaten black waistcoat with a small plastic flower pinned to the lapel, and a pair of long, baggy trousers now tucked into her ex's boots. Under the waistcoat, a dark gray sweater completed the look. *The look*. She glanced past the man to the TV, one of the few things left in the townhouse, and saw an

advertisement for the all night sci-fi marathon. The Day the Earth Stood Still, Invasion of the Body Snatchers, *Frankenstein*. Grace turned back to the microscope, rubbing her temple with her free hand as she chewed on a 150 dollar pen.

"How's my blood looking, doc?" he asked, peering over her shoulder.

She looked down at her notes, then at the slide. "It's not... blood," she said, somewhat lamely.

"Maybe if I walk around a bit it'll work better," he said. She looked up at him in puzzlement and realized he was talking about the boots. "Yeah, yeah," she said, standing and grabbing her coat, "Let's get out of here."

"Maybe you're the result of some weird genetic experiment," she suggested as they walked through the park.

"I don't think that's right," he said, grinning to himself. She hated that, he looked... impossible when he grinned. He looked like a drawing come to life, "And besides, it seems awfully judgmental. Why couldn't I be an ordered and pleasant genetic experiment?" He turned around and started walking backwards, doing circles around Grace as he did. "You know, now that I think about it, you're right, pleasant and nice doesn't sound like my kind of genetic experiment. I would definitely be the weird kind."

"You have no recollection of family at all?" she asked him as he circled her. He turned and started circling her while walking forwards, drumming his fingers on his head, then began stroking his chin as he lazily spun in curlicue circles around her.

"No, no, nothing's really – wait, wait, wait wait," he said, freezing in place. She stumbled to a stop, her long coat blowing in the breeze. "I'm remembering something, it was something, something to do with... the night, yes, it was a night like this, *just* like this! I'm with my father, we're together at last, he's been gone so long, and we're lying together in the grass, so warm and red," He wracked his brain, tugging hard on his short dark hair, "It was a warm, Gallifreyan night..."

"Gallifreyan?"

"Gallifrey!" he said, jumping into the air excitedly and grabbing her by the hands, "That's it, that's where I'm from!" He came to a halt, looking down at her with a wide smile on his face. "Where's Gallifrey?"

"I don't know, I've never heard of it," she said, "What else do you remember?"

He looked up at the sky, and his jaw suddenly went slack. His eyes darted back and forth, wide as saucers, and when he spoke he spoke quickly, like every word had to be stated clearly and precisely before it could vanish into silence: "It was a meteor shower, it was perfect, beautiful in both logic and aesthetic. The entire sky lit up, like a festival from the stars," He stepped back from her, raising his hands to the sky, his voice shaking but never losing its clarity as he began to shout, "The colors, so many of them, like a whole shelf of paint spilled across the sky; purple, yellow, vibrant blue and blazing

red and brilliant, brilliant green—" He froze, and snapped his gaze down to Grace, his voice trembling. "Grace."

She stood next to him, her heart on fire. "What is it?" she asked, almost a whisper.

He spoke very solemnly, and very seriously, and very clearly stated: "These shoes are the best fit I've had in over a thousand years."

Back in the TARDIS, the Master opened up a drawer and pulled out two red velvet sacks. "Once, this all was mine," he said, gesturing at the enormous space, "My beautiful vessel, a doorway to any world and any opportunity in the universe. All mine... until he stole it." The Master walked past Chang Lee, surveying the console room, pursing his lips at some ancient memory. "He should have never been allowed out," he intoned, sneering.

Lee shrugged, "All I know is, I was told he was dead."

The Master shook his head, sighing, "No, *that* body had died, but now he's transformed, regenerated into another one. My body can do this a total of twelve times, it's a gift, a special secret known only to a select few... but he's taken them. Stolen my lives... most of them, anyways. As many as he can."

Lee followed the Master, hanging on his every word. "What did he do with them?"

The Master spun to face Lee, his face a grim mask of despair. "Horrors. Crimes unspeakable in these hallowed halls."

"Like what?"

The Master pursed his lips, raising an eyebrow, then answered, "Genghis Khan."

"What about him?"

"That *was* him."

"No way!"

"Yes," the Master said, "*Way*. I may be no saint, I may have dirty hands but I did what I had to do to survive in this cold, uncaring universe. The Doctor, though, he is a being of pure evil. Hatred, greed, pride, depravity, he does whatever he wants to whomever he wants. I have devoted my lives to stopping him, I was on the very verge of victory when we came here but..." The Master stopped, looking Chang Lee over. "What do you want, Lee?"

Lee blinked. "What do you mean?"

"If you could have anything, anything at all, what would it be?"

"Uhhhh, I dunno." Lee looked lost in thought for a moment. "... A million bucks."

The Master smirked, leaning against a steel column. "Just a million dollars?"

"Okay, two million."

The Master shook his head, stroking his chin, "Lee, if we're going to work together, you need to think bigger."

Lee nodded, drawing himself up strongly. "A billion dollars," he said, raising his chin.

"And what good would money do you?" The Master asked, "What could you buy with a billion dollars that you can't buy with the change in your pocket?"

Lee folded his arms uncomfortably. After a moment, he answered: "Power."

The Master smiled, a broad, hideous rictus grin. "Power." That smell rose back up, Lee realized, just as strong as before, how had he missed it, *god, it was filling the entire roo*— The Master handed Lee one of the two sacks, knocking him out of his thoughts. The Master stepped away, taking that rotting stench with him, and Lee opened the sack, looking inside.

"What is this?" He said, running his fingers through it. It was a fine powder, but it felt strange, and it looked like... "Gold dust?" He said, rubbing some of the shiny powder between his finger and thumb.

The Master nochalantly swung the other sack around by its drawstring and Lee realized how heavy the sack of gold he was holding really was. "You can have the rest when I get my body back," he announced, walking off towards a huge set of wooden doors.

"Come here, Lee." Chang Lee followed him, coming to a stop before the doors.

"Through this door lies the Cloister room." The Master gestured, "Go ahead." Lee touched the door and immediately both doors swung open on their hinges, opening into another enormous vaulted room. Wind blew dead leaves around on the granite floor as bats screeched far overhead. In the center of the room was a huge, engraved metal dome set in a dais, a metal staff standing in front of it.

"What's going on?" Lee whispered, looking around.

"I told you," the Master said, "The TARDIS took a liking to you." Lee smiled. The Master smirked, "I must warn you, it has infamously poor taste in companions." As Lee frowned, the Master lead him to the dais, to stand next to the metal rod. He gestured at the dome before them, "This is the Eye of Harmony, a source of limitless power. It is the very heart of this entire vessel. If we can open the Eye, we may be able to harness that power, and use it to locate him."

"How do we open the Eye?" Lee asked, looking down at the large shape.

"Well, that's the trick, isn't it. I came in here to open it up myself but... I couldn't. It's as though it's rejecting me. He's done something to it, and seeing how it reacts to you, I suspect you can make it do your bidding, Lee."

"My bidding? How do I do that?"

The Master took Chang Lee's hand and placed it on the metal staff. "Grasp the rod firmly," he told the boy, "And pull on it."

Lee nodded and, with the Master's guidance, pulled the rod out of the hole. As he did, a beam of white light emanated from the hole, bathing the two of them in a cold white glow. "Whoa, whoa, what's it doing?"

The Master grabbed Lee's hair in his gloved hand and smiled, "I told you, it likes you." He shoved the boy's head down into the beam of light and the TARDIS began to

tremble, energy coursing through the room as the giant metal iris began to open up before them.

Like a puppet cut loose from his strings, the Doctor slumped to the ground. Grace jumped forward, cradling his head, looking at his eyes as they rolled about in his head.

"No, no, no," she muttered, "What is this, some kind of seizure?"

The Doctor's eyes suddenly focused, clear as crystal. He looked into her eyes.

"Something's happening, Grace, something's... somethings happened, I can feel it in my mind, in my hearts, there's something going on, right now, right now I can feel it, I can – I can remember."

She stared back at him, not sure what to say.

"I can remember everything," he said, his jaw hanging open, "I remember it all, I know who I am!" And with that he kissed her, taking her by surprise. Just as quickly, he sprang to his feet and wheeled around the park, jumping and shouting with joy. Grace scrambled to her feet and followed after him. "I'm the Doctor!" he shouted, fists in the air.

"Great! Good! Now, do that again," she said, and no sooner had the words left her lips that his lips met hers.

In the Cloister room, the Master and Chang Lee looked into the Eye of Harmony. Floating in the blinding light they saw things, images and concepts. A figure-8 seal, a casket of red stone, a wooden box covered in gears, a gray haired man with one arm. Suddenly, a figure appeared, a thin-faced man with long, curly black hair wearing a black suit and dark blue dress shirt.

"That's him, that's the guy," Lee said, pointing at the image that floated before them.

"Yes," the Master replied, "That's him. But we need his new body, we need to see what he looks like *now*. I need you to show me that," he said, his hand still on Lee's head. As he spoke, the man transformed into an even taller, thinner-faced man with an enormous grin, short dark hair, and a long, raggedy waistcoat.

"That's it," the Master said, savoring the moment, "That's the face of the enemy." The image grew larger, the Doctor's pale blue eyes filling the room. "Well now, would you look at that." The Master pointed to the Doctor's left eye. "Do you see that? That's the retinal structure of the human eye. *Of course!*" The Master wagged a finger, smiling broadly, "Of course! It all makes perfect sense! *The Doctor is half human!*"

???

TV Guide, June, 1996, "FOX Network passes on Doctor Who"

Doctor Who Exactly?

Fox has announced that, due to low viewing numbers, they will not be taking *Doctor Who* to series. But fans of the show may be excited to learn that it has aired across the pond in the Republic of Britain and is making a big splash! It's very possible that *Doctor Who* may be picked up by one of the British networks, so stay tuned for more news from time and space, loyal Who-fans!

???

Where does that leave our noble Doctor, loyal /who/vians? Tune in later to find out the secrets of the Commonwealth Doctor.

Have you won an Oscar?

Have you been on the show before?

If I pull that off, will you die?

Part 2: The Last of the Time Lords

???

SYFY WIRE, March 2014 “Tom Cavanagh explains why he wouldn't come back as the Eighth Doctor”

With rumors apparently swirling about an American TV spinoff (take that one with a bucket of salt), what does Cavanagh think about taking the title role?

"There's always all kinds of rumours. 'Doctor Who' is like a rumour mill, isn't it? 'Yea, Tom is gonna do this, Ben is gonna do that, there's going to be a spin-off, blah blah blah'. Of course it's all b*****t because it's Moffat who decides what they're going to do next. And of course, now you've got a new Doctor in Gabriel - I think it's only fair that he gets a decent run on his own without any distractions so he gets his feet under the table. Meanwhile, I'm busy with the Flash, who knows how long that's going to be going?"

Still, we wouldn't mind getting some Eighth Doctor mini-episodes once in a while. How about you?

???

/tv/ – Television & Film – 4chan

Anonymous 12/12/11 (Mon) 16:22:02 No.19845830

CIA Agent: “If pulled that off, would you die?”

Bane: “It would be extremely painful...”

CIA Agent: “You're a big guy.”

BANE: “... for you!

haha

Anonymous 12/12/11 (Mon) 16:22:45 No.19845835

Isn't that Doctor Who?

???

Doctor Who Magazine Issue 342, 28 April 2004, Cover

DOCTOR WHO MAGAZINE

NEW SERIES

PRODUCER PHIL COLLINSON INTERVIEWED!

MARCO POLO

THE TELESNAP ARCHIVE

BEGINS IN THIS ISSUE!

STATIC SHOCK

THE EVIL OF THE DALEKS

IN *THE FACT OF FICTION!*

"IT'S THE PROUDEST MOMENT OF MY CAREER!"

AIDAN GILLEN

IS THE DOCTOR!

ALL THE LATEST ON THE NEW SERIES – INSIDE!

???

Dalek

The enormous door slammed shut, locking the Doctor in the darkened vault with the creature. He gently wiped his mouth, whispering to himself, then stepped forward, resting his hands on his belt. "Look, I'm sorry about this," he said softly, looking around the dark room, "Van Statten thinks he's clever, but nevermind him. I got your signal, I've come to help you. I'm the Doctor."

His words fell into empty blackness. The only thing visible in the room was a soft blue light in the distance. After a moment, the light stirred slightly. The Doctor smiled, raising his chin. Whatever it was, it had understood him. And then, with one word and a pair of blinking lights, the entire universe came crashing down around him:

"Doc-Tor?"

The Doctor froze. "Impossible," he hissed.

"THE DOCTOR?!" Screeched the creature at the other end of the room. The lights switched on as the creature began moving, furiously straining against its chains.

"EXTERMINATE! EXTERMINATE! EXTERMINAAAAAAATE!"

The Doctor scrambled back, falling on his butt as he did. He banged his fists against the vault door, shouting, "You have to let me out! Let me out of here!"

"YOU ARE AN ENEMY OF THE DALEKS! YOU MUST BE DESTROYED!"

The Doctor turned, his eyes narrowing at the creature. By now it should have incinerated him, and yet... his eyes fell on the gun-stick, mangled and rusted along with the rest of the Dalek's form, he now realized. The Doctor's sneer melted, becoming a smug smirk. "It's not working," he whispered, approaching the Dalek. He chuckled, a low, unpleasant giggle out of one side of his mouth. "The one thing you're good for and you can't do it. Ohhhh, this is rich. The great space trashbin, terror of the universe!"

The Dalek struggled, wriggling in its chains uselessly as the gun-stick flailed about.

"KEEP BACK!" it ordered, sliding a few inches back as the Doctor approached it.

"What for?" he asked, still sauntering forward, "What are you going to do? If you can't kill, then what's the point of you?" He came to a stop a few inches away from its eyestalk, staring into the blue lens. "What are you here for?"

"I AM WAITING FOR ORDERS."

The Doctor shook his head lightly, "What does that mean?"

"I AM A SOLDIER. I WAS BRED TO RECEIVE ORDERS."

"You're never going to get any," the Doctor said, "Ever again."

"I DEMAND ORDERS!"

"They're never going to come. Your race is dead," he growled, "You all burned. All of you. Ten million ships on fire, the entire Dalek race, wiped out in an instant."

"YOU LIE!"

The Doctor drew back, sneering as he hissed, "I saw it happen. *I made it happen.*"

"YOU DESTROYED US?"

The Doctor remained still but his eyes were in motion, not so much searching the room as searching his mind. He stepped back, taking long slow steps away from the Dalek, out of the burning lights pointed at it. "I had no choice," he whispered.

"AND WHAT OF THE TIME LORDS?"

"Dead," the Doctor said, his voice soft and low as he fell into shadow, "They burned with you. The glorious end of the last great time war. Everyone lost."

"AND THE COWARD SURVIVED."

"Yes, I did," the Doctor hissed, "And I got your little signal. 'Help me, oh help me,' poor little thing." He put his hands back on his belt, lowering his gaze, "But there's no one else coming. There's no one else left."

The Dalek lowered its eyestalk, the harsh voice falling quiet, "I... AM ALONE... IN THE UNIVERSE?" The Doctor nodded. The Dalek looked back up at him. "SO ARE YOU.... WE... ARE THE SAME."

"We're not the same," the Doctor yelled suddenly, stepping forward with his finger raised, "I'm nothing like you, nothing!" Suddenly, he closed his fist, his breath catching. "Or perhaps... perhaps we are," he said, looking around the room, "You know what, perhaps we are the same, you and me. Because it strikes me that I know what should happen here, what you deserve." He walked over to the desk nearby as he spoke, examining the controls until his eyes fell on a large lever. He smirked and looked back at the Dalek, grabbing the lever. "Exterminate," he said and then threw the lever.

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io9, 2014, "Game of Thrones star Aidan Gillen on why he left Doctor Who"

While the actor has always been forthcoming about his reasons for leaving the program after only one series to join the cast of *The Wire*, fans of *Doctor Who* have often assumed there must be something more to the story.

"I know that people like to speculate, that's human nature," the actor explained in a recent interview on the press tour for *Game of Thrones*, now in its third season. "But the fact of the matter is that we had almost no support from the BBC, everyone was greatly concerned that we were making thirteen episodes and that would be it, and it just seemed to me that the offer being made by HBO was more genuine and reliable than expecting the BBC to keep up. I'm old enough that I remember the row over the first hiatus, when they almost canceled the series on Andrew Clarke and he couldn't get work during the 18 months it was off the air. David [Simon] and Eric's [Overmyer] offer came at a time when I was greatly concerned about the success of Doctor Who. I've never regretted accepting that offer, though I do regret the controversy that arose after the BBC lied about my departure."

The controversy he spoke of was sparked after the BBC announced his departure without his consent, shortly before the 2005 series of Doctor Who began airing, seemingly confirming his fears about their lack of support. In their announcement, the BBC implied the reason he wished to leave the part was to avoid typecasting, the same reason given for the departures of first Doctor Stanley Baker, second Doctor Wensley Pithey, and fifth Doctor Roshan Seth. Gillan then fired back in the pages of Britain's lively tabloid market, revealing that he'd gotten "a better offer from an American network," as the Daily Mail had phrased it in their bombshell headline. The controversy

hung like a shadow over the first series of the rebooted program, such that even fan favorite Richard Harrington's casting as the tenth Doctor was kept a secret until late into series 1's broadcast.

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The Parting of the Ways

Rose stirred on the floor. She heard the grinding hum of the TARDIS in flight and opened her eyes. She looked around in a daze. The Doctor stood at the controls of the TARDIS, right where she'd just been standing. It was like it was all a dream.

"What happened?" she asked, groggily.

"Don't you remember?" the doctor replied, staring at the scanner.

She sat up, rubbing her head. "It's like... there was this singing..."

"That's right," the Doctor said, his voice soft and breathy, "I sang a song and the Daleks scampered away like rabbits."

"I was at home," Rose said, trying to work it out, "No, wait, I wasn't, I was... in the TARDIS and... there was this light? I can't remember anything else." She shook her head, blinking a bit, then looked up at the Doctor.

He was looking back at her, that little half-smile of his plastered on his face. "Rose Tyler," he said, his gaze fixed on her. "I was going to take you so many places, you know. Barcelona, perhaps. Not the city, Planet Barcelona. Marvelous place." He rubbed his chin and licked his lips, "They've got dogs with no noses, you know. Imagine how many times a day you can tell that joke. You'd think it would stop being funny after a while, and it never does."

"Why can't we go?" Rose asked, her eyebrows raised.

"Maybe you will," the Doctor said, then averted his gaze. "Maybe I will." He looked back at her. "But not like this."

"You're not making sense!"

"Oh, Rose, I may never make sense again. I may end up with two heads!" He chuckled, "Or no head at all. Don't say it would be an improvement, you're no good at lying." He stood, stretching his back, "The thing is, this process... it's more art than science. I've never had the hang of it."

Something then happened, a flash of light, and the Doctor staggered back, clutching his chest and coughing.

"Doctor!" Rose shouted, rushing to help him.

"Stay back!" he rasped, holding out his hand. "Stay back. Don't come a step closer."

"Doctor, what's going on?" Rose asked, shifting her weight from foot to foot nervously, her hands balling into fists.

"I absorbed it all, Rose, all the energy of the Time Vortex." The Doctor gulped for air. "No one can survive that. Not even me."

"Can't you do something?"

"I can, Rose," He whispered, looking intently at her, "I'm doing it now. Time Lords have a special gift, a way of cheating death. I'm summoning this gift, as we speak." He closed his eyes for a moment, his breathing coming very forcefully, very measured, like he was preparing for a dive. "Every cell in my body will be regenerated and I'll survive, but Rose," He opened his eyes and stared into hers, "It means I'm going to change."

She stared back at him silently, her mouth hanging open.

"I'm never going to see you again, Rose. Not with these eyes, not with this face. He will still be me, but he'll be different. I don't know how he'll act or seem, but he'll be me."

"Doctor..."

"Before I go—" his breath was coming more softly now, more shallow.

She sobbed quietly, "Doctor, don't say that."

"Rose. Before I'm gone, I just want you to know, this has been the best time of my life. You were marvelous, absolutely marvelous."

Rose smiled, and the Doctor smiled back.

"And, you know... so was I."

There was a sudden burst of energy, a fountain of gold and orange exploding out of the Doctor. Rose stumbled back away from him, screaming in shock and covering her head. After a second, the explosion stopped, leaving her blinking in the sudden darkness.

When her vision cleared, the Doctor had vanished. Where he had stood was a man wearing the same turtleneck and jeans, only he wasn't the Doctor. This man was short and somewhat stocky, with a square head and dark, heavy features. Long side burns reached down from his long, black hair. He looked like the picture of Edgar Allen Poe on the back of the copy of *The Telltale Heart* she'd been issued in school.

"Hullo," he said to her, looking lost and forlorn. "Oh, goodness. My voice, that's different, what is that? Welsh? Am I welsh again?" He rubbed his neck, "Still male, I see." His hands wandered up his face, "Ohhh, gosh, the cheeks are a bit much, aren't they. Blimey, those sideburns..."

Rose cowered next to one of the columns of the TARDIS, staring in horror and shock at the man before her. He glanced at her and blinked. "Oh, hullo," he said, taking his hands off his face. "Sorry about that, always curious, that's me. What were we doing?" He turned to the controls, tapped a few buttons, and then slapped the side, "Right, of course!"

He turned back to her and nodded apologetically, "Terribly sorry, I'd almost forgotten. Barcelona!"

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Rise of the Cybermen – Wikipedia

"Rise of the Cybermen" is the fifth episode of the second series of the British science fiction television programme *Doctor Who*. The episode introduces a non-extraterrestrial reinvention of the Cybermen, as well as a parallel universe which would serve as a recurring plot element in the series. It is the first part of a two-part story, the concluding part being "The Age of Steel". The TARDIS becomes stranded in an alternative universe where Rose Tyler's mother is alive and the British Monarchy never fell. The plot concerns Cybus Industries, a technology company which is being countered by an underground resistance. The Doctor, Rose and Mickey Smith discover a plot by Cybus co-founder John Lumic to convert the population of London into monotonous cybernetic creatures resembling enemies the Doctor has faced before.

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Blink

Larry pressed play on the portable DVD player. On the screen was that strange man, with his chubby face and sad eyes. He wore a dark grey jacket with no tie, his collar hanging open. He looked pathetic, Sally realized, if he'd come up to her on the street she'd have thought him a homeless person.

"That's him," Larry said, also matching that broad description.

"The Doctor," Sally said.

"Who's the Doctor?"

"He's the Doctor."

"Yes, I am," The Doctor replied with a weary sigh.

Sally stared at the screen. "Okay, that was scary."

Larry shook his head, "Nah, he sounds like he's replying but he always says that."

"Yes, I do," the Doctor said.

"And that," Larry said.

The Doctor nodded. "Yes. And this, too."

Sally knelt next to the DVD player, staring at the screen. "He can hear us," she said, "Oh my god, you can really hear us!"

"Of course he can't hear us," Larry said, rolling his eyes. "Look, here, I've got a transcript, see? Everything he says." Sally watched the screen as the Doctor looked towards Larry. "'Yes, I am,' then 'Yes, I do,' then 'Yes, and this too,' and then he says—" In unison, both of them spoke: "I'm sorry, do you need me here for this?"

"Sorry," Larry said, shying away from the screen.

"Who are you?" Sally asked the DVD player.

The Doctor sighed, scratching his forehead, "I'm a traveler of time," he said, his voice deep and quiet, "At least, I was. I'm trapped now, in 1969."

"We're trapped," said a woman, stepping into view of the camera. She was black and wore a hairband along with her shitty attitude, "All of time and space he promises me, now I've got a job in a shop! I've gotta support him?"

"Martha, please," The Doctor said.

"Sorry," she said, rolling her eyes, and stepped away from the camera.

"I've seen this bit before," Sally said to Larry.

"Quite possibly," The Doctor responded.

"1969, that's where you're talking from?"

"Yes," The Doctor said with a nod.

"But you're replying to me! You can't know exactly what I'm going to say forty years before I say it!"

"Of course I can," the Doctor responded matter-of-factly.

"I'm getting this down," Larry said, pulling a pen out of his pocket and scribbling on the transcript. "I'm writing in your bits!"

"How?" Sally continued, "How is this possible?! Tell me!"

"Not so fast," Larry said, scribbling in the spaces between the Doctor's responses. Oh, the next part was the weird bit.

The Doctor pursed his lips. "People get the wrong idea about time. It doesn't work the way you think it does."

"Then how does it work?" Sally asked intently.

"It's... complicated."

"Tell me."

"Very complicated."

Sally narrowed her eyes. "I'm clever and I'm listening and *don't patronize me* because people have died, and I'm not happy. Tell me."

The Doctor leaned forward, side-eyeing the camera. He raised his hands, his fingers working in strange little patterns as he spoke: "People think of time as a strict progression of events, from cause to effect, because they process time in a linear fashion. To most people, the past is the past and the future is the future. But to an

observer standing outside this chain of causality, time is much more complex, a network of causation and probability, interwoven and intertwining pasts and futures centered around singularities of presence, like a big... ball," His hands curved to represent an invisible sphere, "Of... sort of... timey-stuff."

"Yeah, I've seen this bit before," Sally said, sighing, "You said that sentence got away from you."

"Yeah, got away from me a bit there," the Doctor said, scratching his chin and looking away.

"And then the next thing you say is 'Yeah, I can hear you'."

"Yeah, I can hear you."

"This is impossible," Sally said, sitting back on her heels.

"It's brilliant!" Larry said, scribbling in the transcript.

"Well, not hear you, per se, but I know everything you're going to say."

Larry looked up from his writing, "That bit always gives me the shivers."

"How can you know what I'm going to say?" Sally asked, looking around the room.

"Look to your left," the Doctor said, nodding to the left.

Sally looked to her left, where Larry was sitting, writing down her every word in the transcript. "What does he mean, 'look to your left'? I've written loads about that on the forums." He looked up at her solemnly, "I think it's a political statement."

"He means you," Sally said, "What are you doing?"

"I'm writing in your bits. That way I've got a complete transcript of that whole conversation. Oh ho, wait until this thing hits the net, this is gonna explode the egg forums!"

"I've got a copy of the finished transcript," the Doctor said, gesturing towards the camera, "It's on the autocue."

"How can you have a copy of the finished transcript?" Sally asked, "It's still being written!"

"I told you, I'm a time traveler. Picked it up in the future."

"Okay, okay, let me get my head around this," Sally said, holding her hands out and closing her eyes, "You're reading aloud from a transcript of a conversation you're still having?"

The Doctor nodded, "Honestly, it makes conversing so much easier."

"And to top it all off," Sally added, turning to Larry, "You know *shorthand*?"

Larry looked up from his writing, blinking in surprise. "Yeah. So?" He looked at her defensively.

"Nevermind that," the Doctor said, "How we speak is never as important as what we say."

"Oh, that's the best bit," Larry said, "I've got that on a shirt, it's great, innit?"

"The angels have a blue box, don't they?" The Doctor asked, leaning forward and speaking very carefully, "They've taken it?"

"What do you mean, angels?" Sally asked, "Those statues? What are they?"

The Doctor nodded. "Creatures from another world."

"They're just statues, though."

"Only when you see them."

"What does that mean?"

"The lonely assassins, they used to be called," the Doctor said softly, almost wistfully,

"Nobody knows where they come from. They're as old as time, or very nearly, and they've survived this long because of their defense system, the most perfect ever evolved: They're quantum locked. They don't exist when they're being observed. The moment they are seen by any other living creature, they turn to stone. They have no choice, they simply turn to stone. You can't hurt a stone. But then, a stone can't kill you either, can it? Not unless you turn your head. Not unless you look away. Not unless you blink."

Sally became aware at that moment of the statue in the garden. It looked closer to the window than it did earlier in the day. Had it changed position? Had it changed posture?

"Don't take your eyes off that," she told Larry. He turned to look out the window and bit his lip.

"That's why they cover their eyes, you see. It's not because they're weeping, it's because they're afraid of looking at each other. They can't risk seeing each other, it's their greatest strength and their greatest weakness." The Doctor looked down sadly,

"That's why they're called the lonely assassins." He looked back up at Sally, "And I'm sorry, I'm really, very sorry, but it's up to you now."

"What's up to me? What am I supposed to do?"

"The blue box, it's my time machine. There's a world of energy inside it that they could feast on for all eternity, but if they did, the consequences would be... unthinkable." The Doctor wiped his mouth, staring at Sally. "You have to send it back to me."

"How?" Sally asked. The Doctor simply stared back at her. "How do I do it?"

The Doctor looked slightly off camera, "Well, that's all I've got on my end, the transcript ended there. I don't know what stopped you writing, but I can guess. Listen: They're coming for you, right now. The angels are coming for you. When you see them, don't blink. Blink and you're dead. They are fast, faster than you can imagine. Don't turn your back, don't look away, and *don't blink*."

Sally stared at the Doctor. The Doctor stared back. He blinked.

"Good luck."

The image then froze as the video ended.

"No, no!" Sally stood up, begging the DVD player, "You can't do this, we need you!"

Larry shuffled over, "I'll rewind him!"

“Oh, what good would that do, huh?” She asked Larry, looking at him. He looked back at her sheepishly.
Her face froze. “You’re not looking at the statue.”
His face froze. “Neither are you.”
They both looked up.

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“Doctor Who” Utopia (TV Episode 2007) – IMDb

Doctor Who (2005-)

Utopia

TV-PG | 45min | Adventure, Drama, Family | Episode aired 16 June 2007

Season 3 | Episode 11 | < Previous | All Episodes (177) | Next >

Soon after bumping into old friend Jack Harkness, Martha and The Doctor head off to Malcassairo, a distant planet where an old professor will do anything he can to keep his people alive...

Director: Graeme Harper

Writer: Russell T. Davies

Stars: Richard Harrington, Freema Agyeman, John Barrowman |

See full cast & crew >>

Reviews

10 user | 5 critic

Watch Now

With Prime Video

Photos

See all 11 photos >>

Cast

Richard Harrington ... The Doctor

Freema Agyeman ... Martha Jones

John Barrowman ... Captain Jack Harkness

Alexander Siddig ... Professor Yana

???

Utopia

Martha approached the professor Yana as he grasped his chest, his large eyes bulging out of their sockets. "What's wrong?" she asked the kindly man.

"Chan- Professor, what is it? -tho" Chantho asked, hovering near her teacher.

He sat, collapsed almost, on a barrel, reaching into his pocket as he did, "Time Travel," he whispered, "*Time Travel*... they said there was time travel, in the old times." His eyes teared up as he looked at Martha, "I never believed, how could it be true? Oh, what would I know." Tears streamed down his olive cheeks, mixing with his salt-and-pepper mustache, "Stupid old man, always have been. God, I could never keep time," he said, drawing his hand out of his pocket. "Even this thing never worked." He opened his hand. There was a fob watch in it.

Martha's mouth went dry and she sat up straight, staring at the watch. It was just like—"Time and time *and time again*," Yana whispered, his large, dark eyes looking into the distance, "Always running out on me."

"C-can I have a look at that?" Martha asked, her eyes locked on it.

"Oh, it's only an old relic, an artifact of days gone by," the professor said, smiling through his tears, "A bit like me."

"Where did you get it?"

The professor set his jaw and tilted his head, sniffing, "I... I was *found* with it," he said, lost in thought.

"What do you mean?"

"... an orphan in the storm... I was a naked child, found on the coast of the Silver Devastation... Abandoned with nothing but this."

"Have you ever opened it?" Martha asked, looking up at him.

The professor chuckled lightly, "Now child, why would I ever open it? It's broken!"

"How do you know it's broken if you've never opened it?"

"I—" The professor looked down at it, "It's stuck. It's old. It's not meant to be. I... I don't know."

Martha reached out and turned the watch over in his hand.

It was the same watch.

She stepped back, her breath catching.

"Does it... matter?" He asked her, his eyes narrowing.

"N-no," she whimpered, "It's, ehm, it's nothing. It's just... listen, everything's fine up here," she said, backing away towards the door, "I'm gonna go see if the Doctor needs

me.” She turned and rushed out of the room, leaving Professor Yana and Chantho alone.

Down below, Jack turned the last crank, locking the last of the couplings. “Now, Jack!” the Doctor bellowed, “Get out of there!” He picked up a nearby receiver, “Lieutenant, is everyone on board?”

“Ready and waiting!” Came the response as Jack left the containment room, sealing the door behind him.

“Stand by, two minutes to ignition,” The Doctor said, then rushed to the computer terminal and began activating the sequence. He and Jack worked quickly, hitting every switch and button in perfect order as the intercom announced the departure and began counting down.

Martha burst into the control room and the Doctor looked up at her, “Martha! Genius! The Footprint, it's a gravity pulse! When it stomps down, the rocket shoots up. It's a bit primitive though, it will take both of us to keep the process stable.” He turned back to the controls, shutting down an alarm and working to correct an issue.

“Doctor,” Martha said, gasping from her run, “It's the professor! Doctor, he's got a watch. A fob watch.” The Doctor looked back at her, staring hard. “Same as yours, same writing, same everything.”

“Don't be ridiculous,” he said softly, his face frozen in that same dour expression.

“I asked him,” she continued “He said he's had it his whole life.”

“So what, he's got the same watch?” Jack asked from nearby.

“Yeah, but it's not really a watch, it's this chameleon thing,” Martha said.

The Doctor remained silent, staring at the controls. “It's— it's— it's a device, it's this thing, it... rewrites biology.” He looked at Jack. “Changes a Time Lord into a human.”

“And it's the same watch,” Martha insisted.

“It can't be,” the Doctor whispered to himself, then startled out of his reverie as an alarm sounded. He rushed over, typing on the terminal and shouted, “Jack, keep it level!”

“He could be a Time Lord,” Jack shouted back, “You might not be the last one!”

“That's brilliant!” Martha said, “Isn't it?”

“Yes, yes,” the Doctor muttered, “Yes, it's brilliant, of course it is, of course. But it depends which one. The Time Lords were brilliant, marvelous, but they died. They all died, every one of them except me.”

“Not if he was human,” Jack added.

“What did he say?” the Doctor asked, then turned and stared at Martha, his dark eyes blazing, “Martha, *what did he say?*”

“Nothing, he said nothing,” she replied, “He wouldn't even look at it, like that perception filter thing.”

“What about now?” the Doctor asked. Martha swallowed. “Is he looking at it now?”

Professor Yana looked at his watch. He hadn't really looked at it in a long time. Almost ever, really. Ever at all?

He turned it over in his hands as he turned thoughts over in his head. *Time Lord. Time vortex. Regeneration. The drums.*

Yana closed his eyes. *The drums. The drums. The never-ending drums.* He opened his eyes, and it felt like he'd had them closed for years. He looked at the watch in his hand. "Chan- Yana, perhaps you should rest. -tho"

"If you escape the Time War than it's the perfect place to hide," Jack explained, "The end of the universe."

The Doctor watched the countdown as it reached ten.

"Think of what the Face of Boe said," Martha added, "His dying words, he said – "

The countdown reached one.

"You"

The Doctor flipped the switch.

"Are"

The rocket fired and the footprint went off.

"Not"

The rocket took off, leaving the planet forever.

"Alone."

The Doctor picked up the phone. "Lieutenant, have you done it? Did you achieve escape velocity?" There was silence at the other end, but all the Doctor could hear was those words, those words the Face of Boe had spoken. "Lieutenant," he growled, "Have you done it?"

A crackling voice returned, "Affirmative, Doctor! We'll see you in Utopia!"

The professor opened his watch.

Chantho looked at her master. Something had changed in him. "Chan- professor Yana? -tho"

The professor moved past her and flipped a switch. Somewhere, deep in the complex, a heavy metal door slammed shut in the Doctor's face as he, Jack, and Martha rushed to the professor's lab.

"Chan- you've locked them in! -tho"

"Oh, don't worry, my child," The professor said, his voice smooth and cold in a way it had never been before, "They won't be lonely for long." He hit the release on the main gate, and Chantho watched on the monitor as Futurekind flooded into the defenseless base.

“Chan- you must stop! -tho Chan- You've lowered the defenses, the Futurekind will get in! -tho”

The Doctor grit his teeth as he tried every possible combination on the sonic screwdriver. Suddenly, the tumbler slipped and the control room door opened. He rushed into the hall beyond, followed closely by his companions. They rushed through the empty hallways once crowded with refugees and stumbled to a halt as a wall of Futurekind came rushing around the corner towards them. “This way,” the Doctor yelled to Jack and Martha as he led them back towards a service tunnel.

“Chan- I'm sorry, professor, I'm so sorry,” Chantho said, the professor typing something into the controls across the room, “But I have to stop you, you're destroying all our work -tho.”

The professor turned to reply and then shut his mouth. Chantho had a gun pointed at him.

“Oh,” he whispered softly, looking at her pistol, then up at her. His eyes, dark and brilliant, practically glowed, “Now I can say I was provoked.” He raised his hand, revealing a sparking live wire. He advanced on her, and she took a step back.

“Chan- Don't come any closer! -tho”

“Did you never think, all those years standing right at my elbow, to ask about that watch?” He asked. “*Never?*” He hissed at her, “Did you never once think, in all that time, to set me *free?*”

“Chan- I'm sorry -tho Chan- I'm so sorry! -tho”

The professor wrinkled his bushy eyebrows in disgust, “Eugh, your chans and your thos, always wiggling about, driving me *insane!*”

“Chan- Professor—”

“*That is not my name!*” he roared, stepping closer. “The professor was a *story*, a disguise so perfect that I even fooled *myself.*”

“Chan- Then... who are you? -tho” Chantho asked, staring up at him.

He hissed back, “I am...” then, suddenly, his demeanor changed. He straightened up, looked down, and smiled at her coldly. The professor never smiled like that. “... the Master.” He lashed out, jamming the live wire directly into her thorax.

The Doctor, Jack, and Martha reached the door to the lab. It was locked. The Doctor pounded frantically on the door as Jack started typing quickly on the keypad, “Professor, professor! You have to let us in! Jack, get the door open, *now!*”

The Master left Chantho lying on the floor, stepping over her to grab the bubbling jar containing a hand. The Doctor's hand. He smirked at it.

"Professor? Professor! Please, let us in, I need to explain! Whatever you do, *don't open that watch!*"

The Master walked over to the navigation system, smirked, and pulled a circuit key out of it. He looked down at it, grinning, and muttered to himself, "Utopia."

"Open the door, please! I'm begging you, professor, please listen to me!" the Doctor pleaded as the Master unplugged the TARDIS power cable. He turned and tossed it away then froze. Chantho, lying prone on the ground, was aiming her pistol at him again. This time, she didn't give him time to react, she just pulled the trigger, then collapsed dead on the floor.

The Master staggered back into the TARDIS, clutching his chest. He perched against the doorframe of the TARDIS, gasping for ragged breaths. And then, the lab door burst open and the Doctor strode in, staring him dead in the face. The Master stared right back, then tipped back into the TARDIS and slammed the door shut.

The Doctor leapt across the room, throwing his key into the TARDIS lock, but it wouldn't open. He drew out his sonic screwdriver and worked it on the lock, and a terrible sound filled the lab. "It's deadlocked, Doctor," the Master gloated, his ragged breath audible over the intercom, "No use trying."

"Let me in!" the Doctor hollered as Martha kneeled next to Chantho.

"She's dead," she whispered.

"Martha," Jack shouted, holding the lab door shut as Futurekind started pounding on the outside, "I broke the lock! Give me a hand!"

"Everything's changed!" The Doctor bellowed, his voice cracking, "It's just the two of us now! We don't have to fight, it's all different now!" The TARDIS stood silently before him. "Just let me in!"

Inside the TARDIS, the Master was limping around the console, gripping his gut. "The mighty lord of time killed by an insect," he growled at himself, sneering, "And by a girl, no less. So inappropriate."

He limped forward, checking the controls were sound, then said to himself, "Still.. if the Doctor can be young and strong again... then so can I." He stepped away from the controls and looked at his hands, watching them glow a haunting golden white. "The rebirth of the Master," he declared, then chuckled. And then, just for old time's sake, he threw his head back and cackled, raising his arms and letting the artron energy pour out of him in a flood.

The lab door jolted open and scarred, clawed hands reached through the gap, tattoos and thorny piercings covering them. "Doctor, you better think of something!" Jack yelled as he and Martha shoved all their weight against the door.

"Now then, Doctor!" came a voice out of the TARDIS, different than before. It was... soft. He spoke trippingly with a sing-song, "Ohhhh~ New voice! Hullo~ Hello~ Hallo~!"

The Doctor stared in horror at the TARDIS.

"Anyhoo, how's about you and me have a spot of tea and we chat about all my plans and you work out a way to stop them? Sound's good, yeah? No, I didn't think so either."

Martha turned her head in confusion, "Hold on, I know that voice!" The door slipped out of her hands and opened a couple inches more.

"I'm asking you, please, just stop," the Doctor pleaded, clenching his fists, "Just think, just for a minute!"

"I'm sorry, who were you talking to?" the voice called back teasingly.

The Doctor swallowed. "Please, Master."

A groan came over the intercom, "Ohhhhh, I love it when you use my name~"

Just then, the TARDIS engines kicked in and it began to groan. The Doctor raised his screwdriver and concentrated very carefully on one component in the TARDIS navigation circuits.

"I can't hold it much longer!" Jack cried out as the TARDIS light began its slow pulse.

"End of the universe, eh? Good luck with that!" the Master called out as the TARDIS started fading away.

"Doctor, stop him!" Martha yelled as the TARDIS vanished.

???

#Morlock | Tumblr

IamSherlocked

6 Gif Files Failed To Load

If you want me to shake hands with you in hell, I shall not disappoint you.

#Morlock #Team Morlock #Sherlock Holmes #James Moriarty #Moffat Hate #Shipping
#The Reichenbach Fall #TW Gif Warning

221Bitch

So I know I said I wouldn't be posting more MorLock fic...

... and technically, this isn't! I wrote it this morning while I was rewatching *The Reichenbach Fall*, in that scene on the rooftop, and I thought what it must have been like up there for the two actors, so...

Read More...

Benedict stood stock still just inches away from John and whispered to him, low and slow, "I am you. Prepared to do anything." His eyes were fixed on John's, a light brown, almost amber. "Prepared to *burn*. Prepared to do what ordinary people won't do. You want me to shake hands with you in hell I shall not disappoint you."

"Cut!" yelled the director, "That's great! Well set up the next shot, just give us a few."

The two men remained standing, staring at each other. "People are going to start talking," John Simm said, looking up at the tall, chiseled actor.

"Let them talk," Benedict Cumberbatch said, smirking at his co-star.

"What would your wife think?" John asked, licking his lips slightly.

"She loves watching me with other men," Benedict confessed, averting his gaze and blushing.

???

The Sound of Drums

A whirl of energy appeared in an alleyway and three people fell out of it: The Doctor, a Time Lord of Gallifrey, Jack Harkness, a renegade Time Agent, and Martha Jones, a medical student. They hit the pavement and rolled to a stop, all three coughing and struggling to stand.

"Ohhhh, my head," Martha moaned, rubbing her temple.

"Time travel... without a capsule," the Doctor said between coughs, standing up, "Never a good time."

Jack stretched, his back and neck clicking, "At least we made it." He looked around.

They were in an alley, papered with signs for rock bands and restaurants and politicians.

"Eat at Joes" covered up by "Vote Celt". "Earth," Jack said, "21st century, by the looks of it. Wow, talk about lucky."

"That wasn't luck," the Doctor said, straightening his jacket, "That was me."

As they walked through the city, the Doctor explained their escape from Malcassairo as the result of his quick thinking and genius.

"Well, the moral of the story is if you're gonna be stuck at the end of the universe," Jack declared, raising his wrist, "Get stuck with an ex-Time Agent and his Vortex Manipulator."

"But this Master bloke, he's got the TARDIS, right?" Martha asked, "I mean, he could be anywhere in time and space."

"No, he's here," the Doctor said, looking around. They came to an outdoor cafe and he took a seat. "Trust me."

"Well who is he, anyways?" Martha said, sitting down across from the Doctor, "And that voice at the end, that wasn't the professor."

Jack sat between them, "If the Master's a Time Lord, maybe he regenerated."

Martha asked what regeneration was. The Doctor tuned them out as Jack explained, taking in his surroundings. Fliers were up everywhere imploring the viewer to "VOTE CELT". A beggar nearby was tapping a coin to his tin cup. Tink tink tink tink. Another poster, "CELT IS YOUR MAN". Someone's phone rang. Beep beep beep beep. The Doctor's hearts sank.

"— then how are we gonna find him?" Martha was asking as the Doctor came back to earth.

"I'll know him, soon as I see him," The Doctor said grimly. He didn't need to see him, though. It was all coming together.

"If he could be anyone..." Martha looked around, seemingly noticing the posters for the first time. "Oh god... I missed the election."

Nearby a public television was broadcasting the news. "Mr. Celt has returned from the Palace and is greeting the crowd inside Celt headquarters," said a newsreader as the trio approached it.

Martha began hyperventilating, pointing at the screen. He was coming down the stairs. Like the Doctor, she knew him the moment she saw him. His short, curly black hair, his enormous forehead, his pointy, rat-like features. When she'd first seen him almost a year ago, she'd thought he was just another nasty politician, but his soft, kind voice had won her over. *She'd even planned on voting for him.*

"I said I knew that voice," she said, covering her mouth with her hand, "When he spoke in the TARDIS... I've heard that voice *hundreds* of times. I've seen him! We all have! *That was the voice of Aralt Celt!*"

"That's him," the Doctor said resignedly, "He's president. The Master is president of Britain."

The Master leaned over to the woman he was walking with and gave her a long, deep kiss.

That caught the Doctor's attention, his jaw dropping. "The Master... and his wife?"

The Master now addressed the throng of reporters before him. "Hullo everybody," he said in his kindly sing-song, "We have a lot of work to do, and I'm happy you're all here to help me. This country has been sick for so long, weakened by illness and injury. This country needs healing, this country needs medicine..." He surveyed the crowd until he found the camera for the very channel that the Doctor, Martha, and Jack were watching. He leered out of the TV at them, giving a behemoth smile. "What this country really needs is... a Doctor."

???

WhoDaze, December 2009, "The End of Time, or, The Death of Doctor Who: An Agony In Two Fits"

So that's how it ends, huh? That's how Davies ends his historical 4 year run on Doctor Who. Building up for hours to a stupid pun with 6 billion Andrew Scotts, then having 007 himself Pierce Brosnan come in and wipe the slate clean. The end plays up the terrible choice the Doctor has to make, and Harrington glowers more dourly than he's ever glowered before, but at the end of the day just shoots a crystal.

So that's how it ends.

He climbs in a box and gets irradiated to save Donna's grand dad.

So that's how it ends.

He goes around and says goodbye to all his companions like it's *Friends* or something.

So that's how it ends.

And then he walks into the TARDIS and looks almost dead into the camera and says those fucking words:

"So that's how it ends."

Oh fuck off, Davies. Fuck off with your "Some new man goes sauntering away" bullshit, fuck off with your "Sacred Books of Celt" bullshit, fuck off with your "some financial scheme" bullshit. Fuck off back to Torchwood and make us believe in you again.

Still, Ben Mitchell looks like he might be fun.

???

The Rings of Akhaten

Rest now, my warrior

Rest now your hardship is over

The Doctor tilted his head back, breathing deeply. His long green raincoat fluttered in the breeze, his jacket open to show his plain black t-shirt. His long, dark hair ruffled in the wind as the God of Akhaten roared before him. A smile split his full, dark lips, his

bright teeth visible in the darkness. He looked at the glowing golden orb and said, "That's what I'll do then. I'll tell you a story."

Live

Wake up, wake up

And let the cloak

Of life cling to your bones

"Can you hear them?" the Doctor said, theatrically raising a hand to his ear, "Listen! All those voices. All those people, all through time, all through space, all those who've lived in terror of you, of your judgment? All those who've lived for you, died for you, *sacrificed for you...*" He dropped his hand and gazed at the sentient planet with his large, dark eyes. "Can you hear them singing?"

Live

Wake up, wake up

"I've seen this so many times," the Doctor said, shaking his head ruefully at the planet, "You're so sure you're a god. They always are. But you're not a god, surely you have to realize that, you're just a *parasite* that feeds off the lives and memories of whole worlds and cultures. You feast on their memories, of joy and loss and birth and death and sorrow and..." he clenched his fist, shaking it at the planet, "... and you don't even realize what they truly are."

Wake up, wake up

The Doctor let his hand fall and sighed, "So... come on, then. Let's do it." He stretched his back, cracking his knuckles, "I hope you're hungry because I've got a lot to offer." He stepped forward and a tendril of energy lanced out from the planet, striking him in the chest. It felt like a blow torch taken directly to his skin. The Doctor smiled.

And let the cloak

Of life cling to your bones

"Ohhh, the things you're going to see," he shouted, spittle flying as he did, "I walked away from the ruins of Gallifrey, a million Dalek ships in my wake. I marched over the top at the Somme. I cradled the newborn universe in my arms and I watched as its eyes closed one last time, the cosmos growing cold and dark until nothing remained. No time, no space, just me."

The Doctor staggered forward, the energy building within him. "I've left footsteps in the creations of madmen, I've watched worlds and thoughts freeze and burn, and I have seen things, things you would *never believe*. I have lost things, things you will *never understand*." The Doctor grit his teeth, tears streaming down his cheeks, and fell forward to his knees, hissing as he kept speaking, "And I know the secrets of the universe. Terrible things, things that must never be told. I know what the wind knows that makes it howl, what babies know that makes them cry. I know things that will make *parasite gods burn*."

The Doctor rose to his feet, holding his arms out to his side, fists clenched tightly.

“Come on, then, *have it*. Have it *all*. This is what you hungered for, now *FEAST!*”

A blazing blast of golden energy burst from the Doctor's chest, following the tendril back to the glowing orb of Akhaten. It struck the surface of the planet, and the giant began to crumble, just as the Doctor did, falling back to his knees, gasping for air.

Wake up, wake up

???

Doctor Who General - /who/ – Television & Film – 4chan

Anonymous 5/11/13(Sat) 12:21:20 No.32967136

Spoilers are in.

[spoiler]So Geoffrey Rush is back as the Great Intelligence, he breaks into the Doctor's timeline, Clara is revealed to have been split up into millions of echoes by it, we see her meeting Baker, Holder, she yells at Harris when he drives past her in Bessie, there's a scene that looks like a crossover between Cavanagh and Pithey, which is really just a tall guy and a fat guy running around an 80s American mall, then the Doctor saves her from his timeline and they meet the Other Doctor.[/spoiler]

And yes, the rumors about the “big star” Doctor are true. No, they're not bringing in Jared Harris to play his dad. Bigger star.

Much bigger.

???

The Name of the Doctor

The Doctor and Clara stood in the Doctor's timestream, staring at a figure with its back to them. Clara teetered on her feet, the experience both exhausting and impossible. The Doctor, her Doctor, held her tight. All joy and elation at her rescue melted from his long, dark face to be replaced by shame and horror at the figure before them.

“Who's that?” Clara asked, breathing heavily.

“That's... let's go,” the Doctor said, still frozen in place.

“But who is that?”

“It's me. There's only me here. Whatever, let's go.”

"But I never saw that one," Clara told the Doctor, "I saw all of you. Eleven faces, all of them are you." Her vision started to go dark and blurry as she leaned on his arm, "You're the eleventh Doctor."

The Doctor shook his head, supporting her weight as they both looked at the figure with its back to them, "No, no, I said he was me, I never said... I never said he was the Doctor."

"I don't understand," she said, her head swimming.

"Look, my name, my real name, now," the Doctor said, taking her hand in his to emphasize, "It doesn't matter. The name I chose is the Doctor. The name you choose, yeah, it's a promise you make." He squeezed her hand as he stared at the back of the other man's head. "And he's... the one that broke the promise."

Clara's eyes rolled up into her head and she began to fall. The Doctor swiftly gathered her up in his arms, his square, olive face looking down at her vacant, lolling expression.

"He... he is my secret," the Doctor declared, and turned to leave.

And then he heard that voice.

A voice he'd shut out of his own mind for hundreds of years. Rasping up out of the darkness once more to speak those cursed words to him.

"What I did, I did without choice."

The Doctor froze, holding Clara in his arms. He gathered his own voice and responded: "I know."

"In the name of peace. And sanity."

The Doctor turned his head and took one last look back at the figure. "But not in the name of the Doctor." He then trudged ahead into the darkness and swirling chaos.

He had to keep moving.

Anywhere was better than here.

The figure turned around, watching the echo of his future self walk away. His face was square, his hair short and white. A scar marred one of his heavy brows, and his jaw was held with grim tightness, betraying no fear, no joy, no remorse. Despite every fiber of the Doctor's being fleeing from his past, the figure, the Warrior, simply... was.

INTRODUCING

ANTHONY HOPKINS

AS

THE DOCTOR

???

The Day of the Doctor

A million Dalek ships set the sky of Gallifrey on fire, and all the security council could do was watch it burn.

"Another one," a Time Lord told the General as he entered the war room.

"Are we sure it's from him?" The General asked.

"Oh yes."

"Why would he do that?"

The General came to a halt before the tactical display. The readouts were relentlessly grim, the entire Dalek race arrayed before him. And there was the Doctor's message, in plain block letters :

GALLIFREY STANDS

The General rolled his eyes, "What's the mad fool talking about now?"

"Hello-hello! Gallifrey high command, this is the Doctor!" came a young, chipper voice. A communications channel opened up, revealing a tall, well built olive skinned man with long, dark hair.

"Gallifrey, this is, um, also the Doctor, are you receiving?" came a softer, lower voice. A channel opened, revealing a very sad-faced pale man, baggy eyes staring out at them. A third channel opened and a craggy, heavysset man appeared, a bandoleer slung over one shoulder covered in screwdrivers. "This is also the Doctor," he said in a soft, rasping voice. "We stand with you."

"Dear god, three of them," the General moaned, his entire body frowning. "All my worst nightmares come true."

"General, we have a plan," the sad-faced one said.

"At the moment, it's not great," the chipper one said.

"It probably won't work," the first one said, sighing.

"And even if it does, the danger is immense," the third, older one now said.

"I thought that 'not great' covered that pretty well, but that's okay. It's okay."

"Sorry."

The chipper doctor straightened up, typing something on his console. "We're bringing our TARDIS into your lower atmosphere as we speak."

"TARDISes, in fact," the oldest (or rather, youngest) Doctor corrected.

"We'll position them at equidistant intervals around the equator," the sad Doctor said, winding a spring on his console.

"Oh, what a lovely word you've learned," the white haired Doctor said.

"What are you actually planning?" the General demanded of the Time Lord.

The youngest (oldest?) Doctor turned to the communications channel and declared:

"We're going to freeze Gallifrey."

"I'm sorry... what?"

"Using our TARDISEs, we're going to freeze Gallifrey in a single moment of time," the sad Doctor said.

"Exactly like a stasis cube," the white haired Doctor added, "A single moment of space time, preserved in a parallel pocket universe."

"Except we're going to do it to a whole planet!"

"And all the people on it."

"I'm sorry," the General said, shaking his head, "Even if that *were* possible— which it's not —why would you do something like that?"

"Because I've seen what happens if I don't," the Doctor said.

"You burn," the Doctor said.

"And I never want to see that again," the Doctor said.

The General glanced at his adviser, then back at the channels, "We'd be lost in another universe... frozen in a single moment... We'd have nothing."

"You would have *hope*," the chipper Doctor said pleadingly.

"And right now, that's exactly what you *don't* have," the sad Doctor intoned.

The General shook his head, "No, no, it's delusional, the calculations alone would take hundreds of years..."

"Oh, *hundreds!*" the Doctor said, "Hundreds and hundreds—"

"And hundreds and hundreds—"

"And hundreds of years, but don't worry, I started *quite* a long time ago."

A rich, smooth baritone spoke over the open channel in a soft, lilting accent, "Calling the War Council of Gallifrey, this is the Doctor!" A square-jawed elderly man stood at the controls of a pristine white TARDIS.

"You might say I've been working my whole life for this moment," the chipper Doctor said.

"Hroight, g'luck thin!" said a thin, reedy voice.

"Let's get this done, then," a voice slurred harshly

"Let's make magic happen!" said a deep, accented voice.

"It shouldn't be *too* hard," said a pleasantly flat voice.

"Well then, almost got it, I think!" came a bright, precise voice.

"Across time and space, between universal membranes," said a smooth, nasal voice.

"Let's get 'em locked on, then," said a comical, excited voice.

"And we've done that—" hissed a smooth, lisping voice.

"Oh gods, I didn't know how good I had it," the General said, surveying the orgy of fanwank before him, "All twelve of him."

The Time Lord pointed at another signal. "No, sir, all thirteen!"

A long, thin face glared out at them as another Doctor threw another lever.

???

DOCTOR WHO GENERAL /who/ – Television & Film – 4chan

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015788
ALL THE DOCTORS

WHAT

AIDAN

Ryugazaki !H1bh3HV6NE 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015789
wat

40% !//v.13zk5M11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015790
OH FUCK

ALL OF THE DOCTORS

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015791
resetting shitty nuwho

Revolutionary !XS77BadASs 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015792
>>39015768
Rassilon's a bitch

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015793
HOOOOOOOLLLYYYY SHHHHHHHIIIIITTTT
FUUUUUUUUCCKKIIING WHHHHATTTTT
OK
HOLY SHOT
WELL FUCKING DONE

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015794
FUCKING 9

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015795
>AND NOW WE'VE DONE THAT

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015797
BIG GUYYYYYYYYYYY

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015801
AIDAN

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015806
BYRNE

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015807
OH SHIT I SAW AIDAN

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015809
BYRNE

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015810
le stocke footage

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015811
BRUCIE WAS RIGHT
BRUCIE WAS RIGHT

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015812
HOL SHIT

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015813
BYRNE

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015815
ooh fuck doctors everywhere

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015816
ALL THESE DOCTORS!

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015817
NO OTHER DOCTORS

JUST FUCKING 2 SECOND CLIPS

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015819
RETCONNED AS FUCK

[spoiler]lol I don't even watch this shit[/spoiler]

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015820
SORRY WHAT

Anonymous 11/23/13 (Sat) 12:56:50 No.39015824
BYRNE IS HERE HOW YA FEEL

???

Like Breath on a Mirror (Deep Breath) | Eruditorum Press

It's August 23rd, 2014. Nico and Vinz are at number one with "Am I Wrong," with Ariana Grande and Iggy Azalea, Cheryl Cole and Tinie Tempah, and Charli XCX and herself also charting. Ed Sheeran tops the album charts. In news, since Time of the Doctor took its bow there's been an Ebola epidemic, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula, there was a military coup in Thailand, and Michael Brown was murdered by police in Ferguson, Missouri, kicking off the Black Lives Matter movement. We're also in the last month of the campaign for the Irish independence referendum, which isn't technically the sort of thing that goes in these sections since it's just sort of an ongoing thing, but clearly I'm out of practice and anyway it's kind of relevant.

While on television, Gabriel Byrne makes his long-awaited third appearance as the Doctor, just over a year after his announcement. This was not, it should be stressed, an unusually long gap between announcement and first episode. Indeed, the gap was shorter than Mitchell's, and looks set to be shorter than Myles's as well. But there was a clear, if slightly ineffable difference between Byrne's debut and these others. With both Mitchell and Myles there was a tremendous amount of mystery over what their Doctor would be like—Myles because of the obvious gender issues, Mitchell because he was young, relatively unknown, and working with a new showrunner. But Byrne was a known quantity—an already well-respected actor who, indeed, already had what would have been a perfectly good career-defining role in *Miller's Crossing*, if not in *In Treatment*. As a result, in addition to the usual excitement and goodwill a new Doctor gets there was

an unusual level of expectation as to what Byrne's take on the character would be. And the promotion for Series Eight leaned into this, with trailers emphasizing the “where are we going,” “into blackest night” and “am I a good man,” “I don’t know” exchanges from Into the Dalek and Moffat talking to Doctor Who Magazine about putting a “Byrne moment” into every episode in which the Doctor “slightly alarms you.” By any sane accounting, Deep Breath had all the stars aligned - a pleasantly uncompetitive week just before the real heavy hitters of the fall debuted, a receptive audience, and a clear set of marks to hit.

???

Whopinions Blogge, 2014, “One of us is wrong about our basic programming.”

Gabriel Byrne, then. He hits the screen like a torpedo, that perfectly chiseled face, that long, black hair, those cold, gray eyes. And despite looking like the byronic hero of your darkest, most gothic dreams, he manages to sell you on his easy charm with just a slow, sad smile. They put him in a nightgown and hobo clothes and he's still dignified and wonderful, able to sooth fears and ease concerns all over this twilight world. The scene in the restaurant where he tells Clara, “I couldn't ever judge you, I can only be honest with you” really felt like a moment of pure, true friendship between two genuine human beings, not like a bit of sappy dialogue swapped between actors who'd just met a month ago. And at the end, when he stands before her in his pristine white suit and bright blue dress shirt, looking like a modern day Sonny Crockett, and he explains to her “I'm here, right here with you, and you still don't see me, you see some stranger,” and then the phone rings and Ben Mitchell is on the other line with a cheeky grin and some flirty dialogue... god, my heart exploded.

Speaking of cheeky grins, that Marvel-esque stinger with Alison Doody in a tight corset and long jacket waving a parasol around like a slutty Mary Poppins as she flirted shamelessly with the robot was some lovely icing on top of this cake. It seems the internet speculation has decided that “Missy” must mean “Mistress” and that this is therefore the Master, but just for the sake of contrarianism, I'll craft my own theory:

- Missy says the Doctor is her boyfriend
-
- Missy lives in heaven
-
- Missy makes a cute little roar and snaps her teeth at the robot
-

- Earlier in the episode the Doctor meets a woman, flirts with her, and she dies tragically and horribly after roaring and snapping her jaws
-
- Missy is the Tyrannosaurus Rex

Prove me wrong. Protip: You can't.

???

Dark Water

The Doctors, Chang and Who, entered the crypt and came to a halt. The skeletons, formerly seated in their chairs, were now standing at attention as the water drained from their massive tanks.

"Oh my god," Chang said, rushing forward, "This isn't supposed to happen, the tanks are activating!"

"Your cadavers are at attention, son, I think you've got bigger problems," the Doctor responded, surveying the hall.

Suddenly, the android stepped out between them, her mane of blonde hair striped with white. "Now now, children," she said in her soft, seductive lilt, "You've been very nosy, haven't you?" She brandished a small device, looking like a remote.

The Doctor gestured at Missy, "Doctor Chang, I think your robot is acting up."

"Robot?" Chang asked, turning to face the two. He tilted his head quizzically, "That's not a robot, that's my boss."

"Your boss?" The Doctor said, his face freezing.

"Oh my," Missy said, tapping the remote to her forehead and screwing her expression up in faux-confusion, "Was I mistaken? Or was I just a bad little girl?" She smiled at the Doctor, biting her lip as she did.

The Doctor's face fell. This was all going wrong.

"Doctor Chang!" She squealed, turning to face the young man, "Doctor Chang, ohhhhhh, how I've *loved* working with you!" She twirled a finger in her long blonde locks, then coquettishly nibbled on it. "I've cherished every moment we spent, every night we stayed up side by side, working *so hard* to make this all a reality. I'm going to miss you most of all!"

"I'm... excuse me?" Chang said, a deer caught in the headlights.

"I've even got that precious picture you took for me," she whispered breathily, closing her eyes and smiling, "You were so... sweet, so lovely." She opened her eyes, staring at

him with a toothy, hungry grin. "I'm always going to keep that photo, you know. So I'll always have something to remember you by."

Chang looked at her, his breath coming shallow and short. He swallowed, and asked meekly, "A-are you going to kill me?"

She tsked, rolling her eyes, "Don't be so negative, Doctor Chang! I want to look back on this and feel happy, I want to remember the good times!" She smiled pleasantly, "Say something nice, Chang."

"P-please don't kill me."

Her face stayed exactly the same and she spoke the exact same words, but the flirty joy had drained from them completely. "*Say something nice.*"

"Please, please don't," Chang begged, raising his hands, "Missy, I promise, I won't do anything to displease you, just, don't kill me!"

Missy glanced at the Doctor, sharing a knowing smile with him, then looked back at Chang. "Doctor Chang, I don't have all day, you know. I'm a very busy woman, lots of important things to take care of, and I absolutely won't kill you until you *say something nice.*"

Doctor Chang swallowed, gathering himself, "Well, um, Missy, I've been honored to call you my teacher and my superior, I've learned things at your feet that I never thought possible, and I've come to admire and respect you not just as a scientist but as a human being and I truly hope and believe that you'll *never find it in your heart to murder me.*"

Missy closed her eyes and bit her lip again, breathing in deeply as she did. Chang and the Doctor waited with bated breath. She opened her eyes, half-lidded, and gave Chang a demure smile. "Such a good boy," she whispered, then raised her remote and activated it.

Chang didn't even have time to scream as he was incinerated. Just a flash of red and he was gone.

"I'll deal with you in a second, Doctor," Missy said, rolling her neck, "You think you've prepared yourself for the death of a loved one and then it all comes flooding at you!"

The water continued to drain from the tanks, and as it did the tops of the corpse's heads became visible, revealing cold, polished steel. Missy sniffled, "Oh, there goes bargaining and depression, almost done."

The Doctor stared up at the heads of the corpses. The water filtered out all non-organic matter, of course. It had literally been staring him in the face all along. "Cybermen," he growled.

Missy pirouetted around and put a hand on her hip, cocking them to the side and wiggling a finger at the Doctor, "Ohhhhh, tch tch tch, getting a bit slow on the uptake in your old age." She jerked her thumb towards something on the ceiling and smiled.

"Didn't you notice it when you came in?"

The Doctor turned to look where she was pointing and... there it was. Hanging from the ceiling, obvious to anybody who cared to look. It was a metal sphere, intricately engraved and lit up with red lights.

"The Nethersphere," Missy said, "It's marvelous, isn't it? People, they think it's *heaven!*" She giggled, the tanks behind her nearly a third drained.

"It's a data-slice," the Doctor said, turning back to her and fixing her with a steely gray gaze. "It's a cell of the Matrix. Gallifreyan technology. *Time Lord* technology."

"And imagine if you could *harness* that technology!" she said, mimicking his brogue for a moment, "Imagine uploading the minds of the dead and dying into it, just like on Gallifrey. But instead of using it as a big expensive Tarot deck, you use it as a workstation." She looked up at the Nethersphere, the red lights reflecting in her eyes, "Imagine editing those minds, chopping them up and remixing them, getting rid of all those silly little emotions one display of horror or tragedy at a time." She turned to the Doctor, then directed his gaze to the tanks, half empty now. "And while the mind is being upgraded, the body follows suit. No need for emotional inhibitors, no need for clumsy work-arounds. No hacks, no jury-rigging." She turned back to the Doctor, smiling smugly. "Cybermen from cyberspace. Why has no one ever thought of that?"

The Doctor glared at her, and when she spoke his voice was cold and even. "Where did you get it? This technology only existed on one world and that world is *gone*. Where did you get it?"

Missy smiled back at him and merely cocked an eyebrow.

"Who are you?"

She giggled, "Oh, honey, you know who I am." She put her hand over her ample chest, tilting her head back and moaning, "You've always known."

He looked at her chest, then raised his hand, gazing down at his palm and remembered what he'd felt when they met, other than shock and her tongue down his throat: "Two hearts."

"And both of them yours."

"You're another one," he said, looking up at her, his jaw set tight. "You're another Time Lord."

"Oh, please," Missy said, rolling her eyes and adjusting her low, low neckline, "*Time Lady*. I'm a bit... old fashioned." She smiled at him, her smokey eye shadow making her cold blue eyes pop as they gazed back into his.

"Yes, but which one?" the Doctor asked, tilting his head.

"Which one?" Missy covered her mouth in faux-shock, "You mean you've had more than one *Time Lady* in your life? Doctor, you cad!" She advanced on him, her smile fading, "I'm the one you *abandoned*, Doctor. The one you tossed aside like *trash*."

The Doctor stumbled back, hitting the ground and rolling back up. "Clara!" he shouted, "Clara, we have to get out of here!"

Missy rolled her eyes, "Oh, 'Clara' this and 'Clara' that! I should shoot you in a jealous rage, *oh*, wouldn't that be romantic?"

The Doctor whipped out his sonic screwdriver. Missy raised her eyebrow and appraised it. "How many settings has it got now?" She asked. He turned and pointed it at the nearby door, unlocking it, and burst out into –

The sky above was blue and pleasant, the birds chirping and the busy people laughing and chattering as they went about their day, central London laid out before the Doctor. He glanced back at Missy, who walked out onto the dramatic stone steps with him. "Oh, smell that musty air," she said, breathing deep. "Didn't you realize where we were?" The Doctor looked up at the intricate edifice of the building and swallowed. St. Paul's Cathedral.

Inside, he heard the tanks swing open and the hydraulic thuds of cyber-feet marching forward. The Doctor swung the doors of the Cathedral shut and dashed down the steps, barking "Out! Out! Everybody out of the square! There's an emergency!" The crowd failed to give any hustle, merely staring at him like the raving madman he was.

"Oh, don't mind him, everyone!" Missy shouted, leaning against a red telephone booth, "Just some ranting irishman screaming in the streets, didn't realize it was noon already." "Get away!" the Doctor howled at the crowds as the Cybermen now marched into the square. "Get out of here!"

Suddenly, the woman was right behind him, her hands on his shoulders. "Shhhh, shhhhhh," she whispered into his ear, her breath hot on his neck, "Don't squeal, don't squirm, don't make a fuss." She rested her chin on his shoulder as they watched the tourists and crowds gather around the Cybermen, admiring them. "This is a precious moment, Doctor. All the graves of planet Earth are about to give birth." She guided him, her cheek pressing against his, as they surveyed the square, the legions of the Cybermen filling it. "Do you know the key strategic weakness of the Earth? It's that the dead outnumber the living."

The Doctor took a deep, long breath, chewed his lip, then whispered to her, "Who are you?"

Missy sighed, rolling her eyes, "Oh, honey, this again? Get with the program, would you?" She turned him around, her hands on his cheeks, and she smiled at him. "I'm Missy!"

He looked at her, grimacing.

"Short for Mistress."

He blinked, his eyes widening as he truly looked at her as though for the first time. His grimace opened up and she watched as he very consciously tried to keep from smiling. The joy and sorrow and horror and anger came in one deluge as he realized the full impact of her name. And, just for fun, she slammed home.

“Well, I couldn't very well keep calling myself 'the Master', now could I?” She said with a cheeky wink.

???

/who/ - The Doctor Who General – Television & Film – 4chan

Anonymous 8/27/16 (Sat) 13:26:06 No.73691780

>>73691458

>While the mysterious actor that will play Jazz Hands is currently only 20, he will be 23 when he properly takes over from Gabriel Byrne in 2017.

>So far the only reported identifiable features of the 13th Doctor are that he is very young, Indian, energetic, wore a blue suit in his photoshoot, and was seen in pictures performing jazz hands. Because of this and the actor's unknown nature he referred to by /who/ as Jazz Hands, or The Jazz Hands Doctor.

Let Jazz hands die. Let the old meme gather dust.

Let him fade away.

He is the Doctor we deserve but will never get.

13 is almost guaranteed to be a minority woman at this point.

Forget him.

cats12 !zZrUEBWgZM 8/27/16 (Sat) 13:51:51 No.73692623

>>73691780

>He is the Doctor we deserve but will never get.

>13 is almost guaranteed to be a minority woman at this point.

i would prefer a minority woman to jazz hands if they were as good of an actor as Byrne

???

BBC.co.uk, 2017, “Thirteen need-to-know answers to questions about the new Doctor Who”

1. What does it feel like to be the Thirteenth Doctor?

It's very nerve-racking, as it's been so secret!

2. Why did you want the role?

To be asked to play the ultimate character, to get to play pretend in the truest form: this is why I wanted to be an actor in the first place. To be able to play someone who is literally reinvented on screen, with all the freedoms that brings - what an unbelievable opportunity. And added to that, to be the first woman in that role.

3. Has it been hard to keep the secret?

Yes. Very hard! I've told a lot of lies! I've embroiled myself in a whole world of lies which is going to come back at me when this is announced!

4. Who was the first person you told when you got the role?

My husband. Because I was allowed to!

5. Did you have a codename and if so what was it?

In my home, and with my agent, it was The Clooney. Because to me and my husband, George is an iconic guy. And we thought, what's a really famous iconic name? It was just fitting.

6. What does it feel like to be the first woman Doctor?

It feels completely overwhelming; as a feminist, as a woman, as an actor, as a human, as someone who wants to continually push themselves and challenge themselves, and not be boxed in by what you're told you can and can't be. It feels incredible.

7. What do you want to tell the fans?

I want to tell the fans not to be scared by my gender. Because this is a really exciting time, and Doctor Who represents everything that's exciting about change. The fans have lived through so many changes, and this is only a new, different one, not a fearful one.

8. What are you most excited about?

I'm most excited about the opportunity to really get out there, to be someone children of both genders can look up to and want to be like. Most of my work has been in serious or adult drama, after all.

9. How did Chris sell you the part?

We had a strange chat earlier this year where he tricked me into thinking we were talking about Broadchurch. And I started to quiz him about his new job in Wales, and it started to sound like he was talking about bringing Torchwood back so I asked him,

and... he quickly diverted the conversation to suggest I should consider auditioning to be the 13th Clooney.

It was the most incredible chat because I asked every question under the sun, and I said I'd take a few weeks to decide whether I was going to audition. He got a phone call within 24 hours. He would've got a phone call sooner, but my husband was away and there was a time difference!

11. What are you going to wear?

I don't know yet.

12. Is that your costume in the filmed sequence which introduced you as the new Doctor?

No.

13. Have any of the other Doctors given you advice?

Well they can't because they haven't known until now, but I'm certainly expecting a couple of calls - I've got a couple of mates in there. I'm mates with a few companions [John Barrowman, Billie Piper, Freema Agyeman], I'm mates with a trio of Doctors. I know Ben Mitchell, Aidan Gillen, and obviously Richard Harrington. Oh! And let's throw in Luke Evans! Four Doctors! So I'm hoping I get some calls of advice.

???

/who/ - The Doctor Who General – Television & Film – 4chan

Anonymous 7/16/17 (Sun) 08:31:07 No.85023234

HOLY SHIT THEY WENT AND DID IT AND ITS EVE

Anonymous 7/16/17 (Sun) 08:31:13 No.85023240

/WHO/ BTFO

Anonymous 7/16/17 (Sun) 08:31:51 No.85023266

O'DOWDFAGS EAT MY SHIT YOU FUCKS

Anonymous 7/16/17 (Sun) 08:32:54 No.85023325

Lmao. They actually did it. Tooth gap and all. What a joke

???

Twice Upon A Time

The Doctor threw the lever and the TARDIS took off. His long, wild black hair cascaded around his shoulders as he staggered around the console. He caught the scanner out of the corner of his eye and laughed softly, "Oh, there it is. That big, bad universe. Always needing saving. It's a treadmill, you know."

The TARDIS whizzed and beeped at him and he rolled his shoulders, stretching his neck, "Yes, yes, I know. They'll ruin it, like they always do." The TARDIS chirped again, rumbling as it zipped along. "Yes, yes, I suppose that's true..." The Doctor swallowed, looking down at the console, his hand resting on it. "Well..." he whispered, chewing his lip, "I guess... one more go-round wouldn't kill me."

His hand began to glow gold, energy crawling across his skin.

He chuckled, looking up at the vaulted, spinning ceiling of the TARDIS. "Do you get it? Wouldn't kill me!" He sighed. "This material is wasted on you." He smirked, and looked around, "Well then, I guess my only audience is you, Doctor. Now give me a moment, because I want to get some things sorted out first."

He marched up the stairs to the second floor, straightening a book in the shelf as he did.

"That's been bugging me for 150 years, always thinking I'd sort it out," he said, then turned to address the empty TARDIS. "Let's lay down some ground rules, then. First thing's first, never be cruel and never be cowardly." He scratched his chin and smiled, "And an apple a day keeps the Doctor away, so keep on the lookout."

He walked around the upper level, straightening things, moving objects, keeping his hands busy as he spoke: "Remember: Hate is always foolish. Love is always wise. And no matter how hard it may be, mercy is always precious." He walked down the steps, taking his filthy white jacket off. He reached out to hang it on the rack as he passed, but his feet gave out as he reached the bottom step and he stumbled, collapsing against the console, his jacket splayed out next to him.

"Always try to be nice," he said, resting his head against the console, "But never fail to be kind. Oh, and..." He struggled to his feet, breathing heavily, his hair wild, "Now this part is very important, Doctor, *never tell anyone your name*. He picked his jacket back up, draping it over the console, "The mystery is where all the power is."

He looked around the TARDIS one last time with these eyes, with this mind, and smiled.

"Last but not least... laugh hard, run fast... be *kind*." He closed his eyes. "Doctor... welcome home."

He exploded, a starburst of golden energy rocketing out of him, filling the TARDIS with a hurricane of time and life and memory. And when it dissipated, he was gone.

The Doctor blinked, vision suddenly blurry. The wedding ring, River's wedding ring, hit the floor with a soft tinkle. The Doctor stumbled back, legs no longer quite so long. *Short again?*

The Doctor's hands gripped the console, fumbling around for the scanner. There was the universe, still in danger from itself. The Doctor's eyes adjusted, having trouble focusing on the reflection. *Where am I in that universe?*

And then, the image sharpened. The Doctor blinked in surprise. *Do I know that face? Have I see this person before?* Soft cheeks, round, dark eyes, black hair, and those teeth. Like chiclets, with a gap you could drive a truck through. The Doctor looked at her reflection, her jaw dropping. "Oh my god, I'm *still* not ginger?" She thumped the scanner in frustration, shaking her head. "Well, maybe next time, ya?" She said, to herself as much as to the TARDIS.

She reached out, touched a button on the console, "Now, where to next?" The TARDIS lurched over, the doors opened, and she was flung out into the sky.

INTRODUCING

EVE MYLES

AS

THE DOCTOR

???

Where does the story go from here? /who/ nose! That's what's wonderful about this show!

The magic of Doctor Who can never die, it only regenerates.

The Nightmare Child

by Neo

What if the Nightmare Child and the 'Asian child' were one and the same?

"But this is fantastic, isn't it? The Time Lords restored."

"You weren't there in the final days of the war. You never saw what was born. But if the Time Lock's broken, then everything's coming through. Not just the Daleks, but the Skaro Degradations, the Horde of Travesties, the Dream Child, the Could-Have-Been King with his army of Meanwhiles and Never-Weres. The war turned into hell. And that's what you've opened, right above the Earth. Hell is descending."

"My kind of world."

"Just listen! Because even the Time Lords can't survive that."

"We will initiate the Final Sanction. The end of time will come at my hand. The rupture will continue until it rips the Time Vortex apart."

"That's suicide."

"We will ascend to become creatures of consciousness alone. Free of these bodies, free of time, and cause and effect, while creation itself ceases to be."

"You see now? That's what they were planning in the final days of the war. I had to stop them."

"Then, take me with you Lord President. Let me ascend into glory."

"You are diseased, albeit a disease of our own making. No more."

Lee ran.

He'd ran back when his parents would ask him to deliver newspapers instead of playing around in the street. He'd ran back when his parents would yell at his brother Ho night after night, after he'd joined the triads that had moved into Chinatown. He'd ran back when the triads started coming around the corner store and making demands of his father. He'd ran back when his parents were shot dead.

He ran with the same gang his brother did. He kept running with them after his brother's throat was slit. He'd run every time he was caught pickpocketing.

Now he was running from the hail of bullets that had just brought down his friends. He stumbled amongst the trash lining the alleyway, trying to find cover, but it was hopeless. He jerked upwards and slowly raised his arms.

There was nowhere to run now.

Wind began to rise and churn all around him, pelting newspapers at the four armed gang members sneering at him from across the alley. A swirl of blue rose out of the wind, shielding him from their glares. It shuddered and sharpened into some sort of tall blue box.

Lee heard a lock unlatch. Footsteps. A storm of gunfire assailing the box and whoever had stepped out from it. The screech of tires. Panicked yells. The screech of tires again. Moans of pain.

He ran out from behind the box and over to the man bleeding in the alleyway.

"Timing malfunction," the man wheezed, batting his hand at Lee's collar.

"I'm getting you an ambulance."

"Stop it...stop it..."

"What? Here it comes. Hold in there, old guy. Chang Lee will help you."

He ran out to the sound of sirens.

"Were you with him when it happened?"

Lee sat besides the wounded man in the ambulance as it sped down the highway. The paramedic worked away at his wounds with an easy confidence. Lee noticed his nametag reading 'Bruce' and quickly thought up a name he'd give the wounded man if asked.

"Yeah," Lee replied. "We were just passing."

"Is he rich? Cause where we're going, he'd better be rich. Here," said Bruce, trying to hand Lee a clipboard.

"Hey, I'm not signing anything mister."

“Sign, or we can’t do nothing. Come on.”

Lee took the clipboard reluctantly.

“What’s the date?”

“December thirtieth.”

“1999...”

He noted the man’s name down as John Smith. He’d never see him again, he figured.

“Sir?”

Lee opened his eyes. He’d slept fitfully on the rigid hospital chair. This was becoming a lot of work to get at the man’s things, but it wasn’t like he had anything else to do.

“Yeah, I’m up.”

“Would you just come with me please?”

The nurse led him into an office where a woman in a bright blue formal dress fiddled with two paper bags. Lee eyed them, well aware they were what he’d came for.

“You’re the doctor?”

“Yes, yes I am. Are you a friend of Mr. Smith’s?”

“Yeah. Is he okay?”

“Actually, there were some complications and I’m afraid he didn’t make it. I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay,” said Lee, probably too breezily. “I’ll tell his family. Are these his things?”

“Yeah.”

“I’ll take them.”

“...maybe we should contact the family ourselves.”

“No, miss, this’ll hit them really hard. I’ll tell them.”

“You don’t know this man at all, do you?”

“Yeah, I do.”

"Then tell me his real name."

"...I gotta go."

"Wait!"

Lee ran.

"Hey Bruce. Why the shades?"

"I had a bad night."

"Did you want something?"

"What happened to the gunshot wound I brought in? I've got orders to move him."

"He died."

"Oh, yeah. Well, I've got orders to move his body. Where is it? His body?"

"Well, you haven't heard? The body is gone - stolen."

"Okay, where are his things?"

"The kid that brought him in ran off with them."

"The Asian child..."

"The Asian child? Bruce, you're sick."

"Thank you."

Amongst the so-called John Smith's things, Lee had found some strange electronic rod, a yo-yo, an ornate pocket watch, and a key. He'd figured it was for the blue box the man had somehow emerged out of, and so returned to the alley.

After sliding the key into the door, Lee walked into a vast hall full of furniture, technology, and...the paramedic from the night before. Bruce. Slick black hair. A long leather coat. An American drawl.

"The guy from the ambulance? Bruce, don't scare me like that. This place is freaky enough."

“Chang Lee. That’s your name, isn’t it?”

At this point in life little phased Lee. He rested an arm on one of the pillars nearby.

“Well, I never. The TARDIS really likes you.”

“What are you talking about, Bruce?”

“I am not Bruce. It took me a minute with the talking and the walking, but I am not Bruce. I am merely inside his body.”

“Oh yeah? So...who are you really?”

All thought left Lee’s mind.

“Give me the bag. Yes. Now, where is he?”

“Who?”

“The man you stole these things from, where is he?”

“Those are mine now. He’s dead.”

“He’s not dead! He has stolen my body”

“But-”

“And I will die unless we bring him back here. You’re going to help me do that, do you understand?”

“What’s in it for me?”

“You get to live.”

After exchanging some more words and moving to another room in the box he’d come to know as the TARDIS, Lee eagerly watched the Master pull some valuable-looking red bags out of a cabinet.

“You know, this was all mine until he stole it from me. He should never have been allowed to be here.”

“You know, I was told he was dead.”

“That body had died, but now he’s regenerated into another one. My body can do this twelve times, but he’s taken most of my regenerations.”

“What did he do with them?”

“Unspeakable crimes.”

“Like what?”

“Genghis Khan.”

“What about him?”

“That was him.”

“No way!”

“Yes way. Look, I’m no saint, but he is evil, and he’s doing it all with my body. I was on the verge of stopping him when we got here. What do you want, Lee?”

“What do you mean?”

“If you could have anything, anything at all, what would it be?”

“I don’t know - a million bucks.”

“Only a million?”

“Okay, two million.”

“Think bigger.”

“A billion dollars!”

“And what would that but you?”

“...power...”

“Power.”

The Master handed the red bags to Lee. Lee opened them and saw they were filled with...

“Gold dust?”

“You get the rest when I get my body back. Deal?”

“Deal.”

The Master smiled and gestured to a set of doors.

“Let me show you around. Go ahead.”

Lee touched the doors. They opened.

“Whoa! How did I do that?”

“I told you, the TARDIS likes you. The Cloister Room...”

Two bats darted around the room.

“Awesome!”

“Isn’t it? Come, let me show you.”

The Master brought Lee to a raised dais where a big round dome sat behind square railing. Ornate staves decorated each corner.

“Here is the Eye of Harmony, the heart of the structure. Everything gets its power from here.”

“So how can it help us find him?”

“Well, as you know, it used to belong to me, but now it belongs to him. If we can open the Eye, we’ll find him.”

“Cool. So, are you going to open it?”

“No, you are. See if you can pull this reflector staff from its mooring.”

“This thing?”

“You can do it.”

Lee raised the staff, and a beam of light shot out from the now-empty socket.

“Yes. Good. Now, look in the beam of light. If the TARDIS really likes you, the Eye will open.”

“Why don’t you look?”

“You pulled the staff from the stone.”

Lee yelled with pain as the Master forced his head down into the light. His grip relaxed as the dome opened up, emanating light and smoke. Wind howled out of the dome, and globes of light began to spew out of it. The smell of newspapers. A low drone filled his ears. The light and wind kept coming, so bright, painfully strong.

A child giggling. It sounded familiar. He felt a vast blackness behind him as that painful brightness in front of him burned hotter and hotter. He felt hungry. Was he hungry, or was it? He couldn't see anything. His brain was so full. His head was so empty. It kept giggling. It unlocked its jaw. Its teeth were so big. He was in the maw. Giggling. Giggling.

Amongst the so-called John Smith's things, Lee had found some strange electronic rod, a yo-yo, an ornate pocket watch, and a key. He'd figured it was for the blue box the man had somehow emerged out of, and so returned to the alley.

After sliding the key into the door, Lee walked into a vast hall full of furniture, technology, and...a bearded man in a odd all-black get-up.

"Hello? Who are you?" The man kept looking at him pointedly. "I'll get you-"

"I only need two things. Your submission and your obedience to my will!"

Amongst the so-called John Smith's things, Lee had found some strange electronic rod, a yo-yo, an ornate pocket watch, and a key. He'd figured it was for the blue box the man had somehow emerged out of, and so returned to the alley.

After sliding the key into the door, Lee walked into a vast hall full of furniture, technology, and...a zombie. Lee gaped for a moment, as the zombie kept staring at him. Then, it began to move closer.

"Hello? Who are you?"

It didn't respond, but beckoned for Lee to follow. He did so, as he took him to a room containing a raised dais from which a big round dome sat behind, under square railing. Ornate staves decorated each corner.

"Take the rod," rasped the zombie, indicating towards one of the staves.

Amongst the so-called John Smith's things, Lee had found some strange electronic rod, a yo-yo, an ornate pocket watch, and a key. He'd figured it was for the blue box the man had somehow emerged out of, and so returned to the alley.

After sliding the key into the door, Lee walked into a vast hall full of furniture, technology, and a man with a goatee and twinkling eyes.

“Hello? Who are you?”

“Oh my dear, you have been naive. I am the Master.”

Amongst the so-called John Smith’s things, Lee had found some strange electronic rod, a yo-yo, an ornate pocket watch, and a key. He’d figured it was for the blue box the man had somehow emerged out of, and so returned to the alley.

After sliding the key into the door, Lee walked into a vast hall full of furniture, technology, and...a severe-looking old man.

“Hello? Who are you? Hold in there, old guy.”

“That is not my name! I am...the Master!”

Amongst the so-called John Smith’s things, Lee had found some strange electronic rod, a yo-yo, an ornate pocket watch, and a key. He’d figured it was for the blue box the man had somehow emerged out of, and so returned to the alley.

After sliding the key into the door, Lee walked into a vast hall full of furniture, technology, and a young man in a sharp suit.

“Hello? Who are you?”

“I am the Master.”

“Hey,-”

“Use my name.”

“Master...”

“I like it when you use my name.”

Amongst the so-called John Smith’s things, Lee had found some strange electronic rod, a yo-yo, an ornate pocket watch, and a key. He’d figured it was for the blue box the man had somehow emerged out of, and so returned to the alley.

After sliding the key into the door, Lee walked into a vast hall full of furniture, technology, and a woman in a purple dress.

“Hello? Who are you?”

“Hello. I’m Missy. You made it.”

“Where?”

“Where do you think you are? Look around you. You made it! The TARDIS!”

“Sir?”

Lee opened his eyes. He’d fallen asleep. He’d tried so hard not to. He tried to hang onto to what he’d been dreaming, some sort of great hall, a procession of people, giggling, teeth, but even those dreams concatenated together in some kind of sequence that made terrible sense they swam away from him. Why was he at a hospital?

“Yeah, I’m up.”

“Would you just come with me please?”

The nurse led him into an office. There was no one inside it.

“Were you with him when it happened?”

Lee sat in an ambulance speeding down the highway. He looked up at the paramedic beside him. He was fiddling with an empty stretcher.

Lee ran.

He’d ran back when his parents would ask him to deliver newspapers instead of playing around in the street. He’d ran back when his parents would yell at his brother Ho night after night, after his grades kept slipping as he got more and more interested in girls. He’d run when his parents would yell at him for staying up all night. He’d run when he felt himself nodding off to sleep. He ran from his dreams as much he could.

He ran into an alleyway. He was so out of breath, he had to stop. As long as he didn’t sit down, he should be alright.

Wind began to rise and churn all around him, pelting newspapers around the empty alley. A swirl of blue rose out of the wind. It shuddered and sharpened into some sort of tall blue box.

Lee stayed still and waited where he was for a moment, but nothing happened. He walked around the side of the box. He knocked on it. He tried to open the latch on its door. Nothing.

There was no one there.

The teeth chittered away. Lee's head jerked upwards. Lee's head nodded down. He was enveloped. A dull roar filled his ears. It was so huge. Sometimes he could see the stars behind it. He felt himself slowly sink further and further down its maw.

Sometimes he was in San Francisco. Sometimes he forgot that too. He was adrift. Sometimes the dreams were so happy. Sometimes they were so sad. He was long past the point of remembering which were real, or that there was any distinction between what was and wasn't real at all. The gaps grew bigger every dream, every waking. Sometimes he thought he could see...something in front of him. Something enormous. Was it in space? He could feel...jaws, closing around him. And the giggling, always the giggling. An enormous baby floating in space, where had he seen that before?

Wind began to rise and churn all around him, pelting newspapers at the four armed gang members sneering at him across the alley. A swirl of blue rose out of the wind, shielding him from their glares. It shuddered and sharpened into some sort of tall blue box.

A swirl of blue came into focus right beside him, distinct against the vast blackness of space behind it. It shuddered and sharpened into some sort of tall blue box. A man stepped out. He had curly hair and was in some sort of Victorian Halloween costume. He grabbed Lee by the arm. The strange man then rested his forehead against Lee's. A voice suddenly rang out perfectly clear inside Lee's head."

"I am the Doctor! Lee, Lee, oh Lee, this is not a dream. The Dream Child has taken you, my friend. But it's alright, I can save you. I can get you out of here."

Lee's vision cleared, like a fog had been lifted before him, and he saw that he was suspended in space, coated in slime. Some sort of thin sharp needles were piercing his skin. He tried to scream, but no sound came out.

"I can save you. Let me take it."

Lee didn't know this man. He was trying so hard to rememb-

Amongst the so-called John Smith's things, Lee had found some strange electronic rod, a yo-yo, an ornate pocket watch, and a key. He'd figured it was for the blue box the-

"Lee, stay with me!

Lee opened his eyes. He'd slept fitfully on the rigid hospital ch-

"Lee!"

The man impaled his hands onto the spikes that had wormed their way into Lee.

Then everything came together.

The Doctor grimaced as the needles went through the back of his hands. Lee was so nearly lost. He had to do whatever it takes to save him.

He could feel the great entity enveloping them instantly lose attention in Lee and turn its teeth to him instead, the much greater prize. Not that he felt like that in these days, where it seemed all he could do was fail in trying to save people on the fringes of the war. He'd managed to help Nyssa on Reave, but learning that the Dream Child had somehow infected the Eye of Harmony and was now beginning to feast on Time Lord's pasts and could snatch away any who'd looked into the Eye had alarmed him like nothing else.

The teeth entirely retracted from Lee, and plunged into him. The Doctor gasped. Giggling thundered through his mind as the Dream Child surely felt mirth in feeling all the past it had to plunder

The Dream Child was adjacent to realities stranger than his own, and anything it could shift, or bring closer to its existence in another universe, seemed to bring it great joy. Like a Weeping Angel gorging itself on a long past, it devoured minds as it broke down all distinctions between how events occurred, between realities, memories, dreams.

The Doctor saw Ian dancing, then felt that moment swallowed up, reality no longer. He heard the Beatles tinkle out of a jukebox sometime in his second incarnation, then felt all the music be sucked out.

The giggling got louder and louder. It sounded less like a human child now, and more like a fox. He saw Grace and Lee completely swallowed up, erased from his past, erased from his future.

Grey worms began to crawl out of the Doctor's chin as his eyes drooped and his hair faded.

"No more," he muttered, then wheezed as he felt his face contorting into different features again. The great fox was lowering its jaws around him. He felt his own identity slipping away and for a second felt he was in the Master's mind instead of his own.

"Hey Bruce. Why the shades?"

"I had a bad night."

"Did you want something?"

"What happened to the gunshot wound I brought in? I've got orders to move him."

"He died."

"Oh, yeah. Well, I've got orders to move his body. Where is it? His body?"

"Well, you haven't heard? The body is gone - stolen."

"Okay, where are his things?"

"The kid that brought him in ran off with them."

"The Asian child..."

"The Asian child? Bruce, you're sick."

"Thank you."

The Doctor saw Lee reassemble in front of him, then lost his sense of reality again. His mind was flooded with thoughts of a father, with battles against Cybs, with the Master ruling Gallifrey, with Borusa talking to him out of a crystal. He could feel himself fading away as the Dream Child's jaws closed lower and lower around him, as Lee came more and more into focus.

Then everything came together.

Lee tried to remember everything. He remembered being so thoroughly fooled by the Master. He remembered betraying the Doctor. He remembered running. But it all slipped away so easily. He needed to centre himself. He peered back into the Doctor's head...

"Hey Bruce. Why the shades?"

"I had a bad night."

"Did you want something?"

"What happened to the gunshot wound I brought in? I've got orders to move him."

"He died."

"Oh, yeah. Well, I've got orders to move his body. Where is it? His body?"

"Well, you haven't heard? The body is gone - stolen."

"Okay, where are his things?"

"The kid that brought him in ran off with them."

"The Asian child..."

"The Asian child? Bruce, you're sick."

"Thank you."

Lee could feel the immense pressure of the Dream Child close around the Doctor, close around him. He'd seen everything in the Doctor's mind, in his past. He had to save him. What did Lee have anymore? His family was dead, he barely had his memories, all he'd ever had was running. No more.

He pushed the Doctor off him, off the needles, the teeth plunged into them both. He felt the Dream Child's jaws lower into him, solely him.

He tried with all his might to centre himself, anything that could hold off the Dream Child long enough to let the Doctor get away...

"The Asian child..."

"The Asian child? Bruce, you're sick."

"Thank you."

The Doctor saw Lee fade away, and the Dream Child glow with new light, but then it was as if he could see Lee's face writ large across the expanse of space.

"He's fighting it," marvelled the Doctor. "He's fusing with it!"

"But this is fantastic, isn't it? The Time Lords restored."

"You weren't there in the final days of the war. You never saw what was born. But if the Time Lock's broken, then everything's coming through. Not just the Daleks, but the Skaro Degradations, the Horde of Travesties, the Asian Child, the Could-Have-Been King with his army of Meanwhiles and Never-Weres. The war turned into hell. And that's what you've opened, right above the Earth. Hell is descending."

"My kind of world."

"Just listen! Because even the Time Lords can't survive that."

"We will initiate the Final Sanction. The end of time will come at my hand. The rupture will continue until it rips the Time Vortex apart."

"That's suicide."

"We will ascend to become creatures of consciousness alone. Free of these bodies, free of time, and cause and effect, while creation itself ceases to be."

"You see now? That's what they were planning in the final days of the war. I had to stop them."

"Then, take me with you Lord President. Let me ascend into glory."

"You are diseased, albeit a disease of our own making. No more."

The Doctor was transfixed by the Asian Child, that great unknowable gaping maw of reality that slid events from different universes together like nails on a chalkboard, grating down memory and sanity and identity alike.

He tried to hold the fact in his mind that it was really the Dream Child, inhabited by Chang Lee who was doing his very best to contain it and maintain his sense of identity in the wake of its endless hunger. But his mind struggled with the cognitive dissonance, trying to accept the two versions of reality when increasingly the one where there never was a Dream Child, only an Asian Child, came out on top.

He gradually became aware he was not alone, and saw a great Dalek fleet approaching, led by the gargantuan command ship of Davros.

Of course, the Asian Child - the Dream Child - was as much a problem for the Daleks as it was the Time Lords, infecting their timelines, distorting their shared reality and destroying any sense of self that enabled a conflict in the first place. It might have been even more unholy to the Daleks, being such a threat to the pillars of identity that enabled them to assert their superiority above all.

The command ship of Davros flew into the great gaping maw, those cosmic jaws, and what sometimes appeared to be Lee's face burning across space, and at other times just seemed to be an endlessly inhuman gaping pit of a mouth, grimaced and burned.

Lee was overwhelmed with rage, depravity, insanity, hatred, an inhuman screech of war and conquest and genocide.

He burned. He engulfed the ship that had entered him, and was engulfed by it in turn, the unearthly wickedness of those within it invading his mind, pervading any sense of self he'd tried to maintain in the face of the Dream Child.

It was such an affront that he felt his mind untangle from the Dream Child's, the hostility and chronological confusion of what had invaded them overwhelming them both. Suddenly he was aware of his own body, and he was held in the Doctor's arms.

"You're safe now. Come with me."

Lee looked up at the great horror before him. Inhuman screaming filled his ears. A terrible hunger before him. It was terror. He shuddered with fear.

"Doctor, I can't remember...what...what is that?"

“The Nightmare Child. Always, the Nightmare Child, Lee. Now let’s get you home.”

Lee’s eyes lidded, and he felt this all slip away from him.

It had just been a nightmare.

“Grace, Lee, Charley, C’rizz, Lucie, Tamsin, Molly. Fitz. Friends, companions I’ve known, I salute you. And Cass, I apologise. Physician, heal thyself.”

The Doctor’s future burned in his mind as he tried to turn around and take himself and Lee back into the TARDIS. The Nightmare Child’s distortion of reality went way beyond past and present, filling the Doctor’s mind with every nightmare real or imagined he’d ever had, or ever would have, but his death kept sticking out in his mind.

He winced. He couldn’t forget this, he owed it to his friends never to forget them, but...how long had he been doing this? Had he already forgotten names? So many...

The pain burned so bright. He could feel names slipping away from them, the fox’s teeth of the Nightmare Child chewing them up, turning them and their eventual demises into nightmares rather than realities he could remember.

“Grace, Lee, Fitz,” he groaned, trying to hold onto them. Then his mind swam and he saw his death again.

“Charley, C’rizz, Lucie, Tamsin, Molly, friends, companions I’ve known, I salute you. And Cass, I apologise. Physician, heal thyself.”

The Doctor staggered into the TARDIS, fell over, dropping Lee to the ground with him, and promptly forgot his future. He took Lee home, then forgot that too.

It had just been a nightmare.

“But this is fantastic, isn’t it? The Time Lords restored.”

“You weren’t there in the final days of the war. You never saw what was born. But if the Time Lock’s broken, then everything’s coming through. Not just the Daleks, but the Skaro Degradations, the Horde of Travesties, the Nightmare Child, the Could-Have-Been King with his army of Meanwhiles and Never-Weres. The war turned into hell. And that’s what you’ve opened, right above the Earth. Hell is descending.”

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“You see now? That’s what they were planning in the final days of the war. I had to stop them.”

“Then, take me with you Lord President. Let me ascend into glory.”

“You are diseased, albeit a disease of our own making. No more.”

Deep Cover

by Gallifrey Immigrant

What if UNIT was behind deepfaking?

"You know we created Deep Fake technology, right?" said Kate Stewart suddenly.

Osgood spluttered. "We, as in UNIT?"

"Yes," said Kate. "It was a necessary security measure. You see, it's getting harder and harder to hide invasions. Everything's documented nowadays. We needed an easy way to change photos of, say, a Yeti in a Zoo so that it quickly could be replaced by a nice hairy man or something."

"I see. So, the Nicholas Cage deepfakes, and the...other stuff, is part of our cover?"

Kate gave a small smile. "Yes."

"Oh, wow," said Osgood.

Kate slammed down the mug she was drinking from. "Of course not! That'd be utterly ridiculous. Do you think I'm using tax-payer's money to have trained agents go on 4chan? *Or go on Reddit?*"

"No, of course not. I try to keep an open mind, that's all."

"That's why I like you, Osgood," sighed Kate. Making a steeple with her hands, she said "Someone among us leaked the basic technology to an unauthorized source. Now, anyone with the right computer can make an edit of Nicolas Cage's face on Barney from Sesame Street."

"Barney isn't...never mind," said Osgood. "Should we be worried? How quickly is the public developing this technology?"

“No, it’s okay for now. I’ve pulled some strings to slow them down. Though I may have created a monster I can’t control. One day, we may not be able to trust our own photos. And then there’s the trouble when it comes to photo evidence of crimes....”

“We’ll figure something out,” said Osgood.

Kate smiled. “That’s what we’re paid for.”

She started drinking her tea, deep in thought. Then “Seriously? Why Nickolas Cage?”

“Indeed. That’s extremely silly,” said Osgood. She made a note to delete the Nicolas Cage edits of the Doctor’s incarnations off her work computer that afternoon.

Clara & Me

by Neo

What if Clara and Me got a spin-off together?

“I told you it'd work!”

“Work? They very nearly exterminated the both of us.”

“Oh, admit it Me, I totally saved your life.”

“It was hardly going to exterminate me.”

“Trust me, I've been in a Dalek sewer, that is what about-to-be-exterminated looks like. I totally saved you from having to marry that giant, green, and frankly suspiciously masculine Dalek puppet. That bit when I jumped over the side? That was amazing.”

Me rolled her eyes but relented with a smirk.

“The only suspicious bit about it was the fact it was another run-in with the Daleks just like we had last year, and the year before that, and the year before that too. Have you marked an annual Dalek adventure on your calendar.”

“Ha! We're time-travellers. We don't need no calendars.”

“Clara, I'm serious, have you still got some sort of death wish even now, because I swear we see the Daleks every year.”

“Let's check the TARDIS locations list then, shall we?”

They did so. Victorian London, 21st-century Cardiff, World War II London, 20th century Cardiff, and sure enough, between all the quarries and corridors, a run-in with the Daleks every year or so.

“Why do we seem to get into trouble every Easter as well?” asked Me.

“What, not more interested in how we seem to top ourselves and get involved in an adventure of even higher stakes than the year before every year before we relax for a few months?”

“Well, that’s not strictly true though is it, in some years we only had a few adventures, then a short break, then a few more adventures, then...”

The pair were interrupted as two menacing figures materialised into the TARDIS, clasping cold, mechanical hands onto the shoulders of Clara and Me.

Cybermen.

JENNA COLEMAN

MAISIE WILLIAMS

CLARA & ME

TTF

GENESIS OF THE CYBERMEN

written by

TOBY WHITHOUSE

Two menacing figures materialised into the TARDIS, clasping cold, mechanical hands onto the shoulders of Clara and Ashldr.

Cybermen.

“You belong to us,” they stated in flat, robotic voices. “You shall be like us.”

The four of them dematerialised from the TARDIS and onto a spaceship overlooking a planet Clara recognised.

“Hang on,” she told Ashldr, “I know that planet. It looks much emptier than when I last saw it, but that’s Hedgewick’s World of Wonders.”

“Hedgewick’s World of Wonders?”

“Yeah, I fought the Cybermen with the Doctor on there. Mind you, seen a lot of Cybermen since then, and I’m not sure what type they were. Cybus? Mondasian? Mr. Clever’s?”

“Silence,” commanded the dozen or so Cybermen with them in the ship, speaking in unison. “Answer our questions or you will be deleted.”

“What questions then?”

“Where is the Doctor?”

“...what do you mean?”

“You are the travelling companion of the Doctor. Where is he? We-”

“No, not anymore I’m not, I’ve struck out on my own now, see? Got my own companion and everything.”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” said a nondescript holographically projected egg, “but this is just entirely too meta for me.”

The set dissolved, leaving nothing but the actors in the Cybermen costumes and the stand-in performers for Clara and Me in front of a crowd of holographic projections, mostly nondescript eggs, but some fully-fledged uniquely identified individuals as well.

“Look,” the interrupting egg continued, “episodes broadcasted live, it was a neat idea, but this episode is just utter rubbish. How am I meant to get immersed when you keep lampshading everything in the dialogue?”

“Broadcast,” said another egg.

“What?”

“It’s broadcast. Not broadcasted.”

The man watched their argument devolve into a back-and-forth about semantics. He’d been quite enjoying the episodes honestly, apart from agreeing that it had been getting a bit too meta. Depending on how this reception went, however, he might walk away with a lot more than just having seen an episode broadcast in the flesh. So to speak.

“How much more derivative can you get?” asked a pompous-looking man who’d chosen to project his actual identity as his holographic avatar. “This was just an unruly mish-mash of earlier episodes, even down to unused ideas like the original Journey’s

End tag with the Cybermen grabbing the Doctor. Genesis of the Cybermen - presumably this was all heading towards using the scrapped original idea for Nightmare in Silver, synthesising the different strands of Cybermen together? Why even bother when it was done so much more elegantly in The Doctor Falls? The thematics..."

The man stopped listening to that user, and turned his ears - such as they were - to a different user instead instead.

"Me personally, I loved this episode," another egg was saying. "Daleks, Cybermen, these are things I know."

"For the Mother Superior's sake, you literally had an episode retconning the end of The Woman Who Lived as being set after Hell Bent."

As the audience feedback reached a pitch too fevered and loud to discern anything useful at all, the woman running the show called for quiet.

"Please, please, all your feedback will be heard, but let me provide some context to tonight's experiment," she said. "The Testimony Foundation-"

"Didn't you rebrand yourselves TTF?"

"TTF refers to the entertainment wing of which I am a producer, yes, but the broader organisation remains The Testimony Foundation. As you know, Clara & Me is another in our long line of spin-offs to our flagship series..."

"Bring back Class!"

"...our flagship series Doctor Who, and we've been delighted by the positive reception audiences have had to Testimony's expansion into entertainment services."

The crowd murmured general assent. The man was more impressed than anyone. Testimony had gone beyond the afterlife and improved people's waking lives, broadcasting the extracted memories of the souls it scanned to the masses. Series extracted from historical figures enjoyed mild success, but it was the vast series extracted from the Doctor that had captured viewers from across the universe. There were whispers that his memories had been obtained less than ethically, some kind of unauthorised hidden scan of the Twelfth Doctor by a Testimony glass avatar, which made some sense considering they had no access to episodes beyond the Twelfth Doctor's first explicit interaction with Testimony.

Doctor Who had taken the universe by storm, but eventually even all its many episodes had been watched, and Testimony clambered for spin-offs to keep viewers interested.

The types of people Testimony wanted spin-offs from rarely consented to sharing their memories, and the types of people that did invariably proved less popular than hoped.

What Testimony had taken to doing now was generate spin-offs by itself. Generating sets digitally was easy, but Testimony had managed to find a way to superimpose Testimony projections of the deceased upon stand-in real-life living performers, a process based on the controversial digital act of deepfaking.

“As you know,” the producer continued, shaking the man out of the types of production musings he frequently lapsed into, “Clara & Me is our first programme made with superimposed Testimony characters as the leads. While we appreciate your feedback on story content, we are especially interested in your thoughts on the effectiveness of these superimpositions.”

“What’s the point of special effects if you’re still using them to tell the same running-down-corridors stories we’ve watched a thousand times already?” jeered an egg.

“Indeed,” agreed the pompous man from earlier, “we’ve gone beyond actual physical limitations determining such constraints on storytelling. Why persist in these limited story structures when your technology allows you to create any scenario you want? You’ve transcended the very need for actors, yet still stick to scripts that feel as if they’re churned out by assembly line.”

The man gulped at that. Most of the audience agreed with the pompous talker, the jeers eventually overpowering the producer to the point where she gave in.

“I understand your concerns, I’m getting a transmission from my boss now and...yes...yes...viewers,” she said with a relenting sigh, “the show has been cancelled. Please keep on the lookout for further projects from TTF. Thank you.”

The other holographic projections logged off, leaving just the man and the very defeated-looking producer.

“Ma’am,” he said, approaching her, “I wonder, if you’ve cancelled the series and aren’t interested in producing any further content, might I be able to buy the rights from you?”

“But them?” she said, looking surprised. “What would you want with them?”

“Oh, trust me, I have more than a few ideas. Well, a few ideas. I have ideas. Would you be interested?”

“Oh absolutely, anything to get this mess off my hands and let me spin it as some kind of win. If you verify your identity and project your actual form here, I can get the paperwork ready. Just one last question, entirely out of curiosity - who do you work for? Why do your lot want these rights anyway?”

“Because,” said the man, his anonymous form melting away to reveal a bald man with a goatee, “we love stories.”

The Wind in the Trees

by Morphant

What if Clara encountered the Hoix?

“There’s a sound you’ve been living with every day of your life that you’ve learned not to hear.”

Laying bent and misshapen, every fibre of Clara’s being willed her not to move.

“Your heartbeat.”

She knew the Hoix hunted by smelling for blood, listening for the heartbeat of its prey. Something that had certainly worked in her favour today was that the barbed wire cuts and the predator’s bite wounds hadn’t been able to draw any blood – although for a moment she had thought they might.

But God, if they didn’t want to make her scream in pain.

“Your physical processes have been time-looped. Frozen between one heartbeat and the next.”

Snorting, slobbering, the creature crawled on four arms across its scrapheap of dead bodies; some decomposed, some half-eaten, and some freshly slaughtered, saved for later like flies in a spider’s web.

“Even your breathing is just a habit.”

Hiding in amongst them, closer to the top, Clara gasped for breath.

It was a tiny breath – like the Doctor said, a force of habit. She couldn’t have helped herself, sitting still and silent in fear for so long, there was no way she could have felt the sound coming and so it had happened and it was about to get her eaten. The last act she had ever made had been one of weakness. So much for being brave.

The Hoix was about a metre away. She could smell its breath. The thought of it cocking its head like a wild animal made the muscles in the back of her neck twitch.

“Your death is an established historical event,” the General had said, “and cannot be altered.”

If she died here – if she ended up just another corpse in this mountain of hundreds - how could she get back to Gallifrey?

Face contorted, nose tingling, tears welled in her eyes as she heard the animal grunt in defeat and trudge, skin patting against skin, back across the pile of the dead.

Hours passed. It was dark, and ‘Me’ was out there somewhere. They had landed close by, following a distress signal. Found a group of star travellers caught by a tribe of savage creatures Clara had recognised from her travels with the Doctor.

“Smile for me, Clara. One last time.”

Sometimes – now more than ever – she prayed that that man would show up. But it would never happen. It couldn’t happen. She knew that.

“It’s alright. Don’t you worry.”

But was that . . . That noise, up ahead, in the forest? That whirring groan . . .

“I’ll remember it.”

. . . No. Just the wind in the trees.

「Vats of Urine」

by Fun2Building

What if Clara hit the jackpot?

"Clara stepped out of the TARDIS and before her was some sort of factory with great big vats filled with urine. 'Jackpot,' she said, 'it's like a watersports dream come true.'"

Radical 12

by Miller

What if the Twelfth Doctor had been rather more RADICAL, in the sort of adventure that makes you go FUCK YEAH?

It was quite a normal day in the City Centre, busy crowds, traffic, people going to work, and then out of nowhere an old looking man on a skateboard came sliding down from a nearby rail.

The man was dressed in what looked like a neon vomit suit, a lime green suit jacket with matching, bizarrely shaped sunglasses, along with hot pink trousers and a leopard pattern hot pink hoodie.

The oddly dressed man pulled out a Walkman, hitting the pause button on whatever he was playing to pull some odd stance and shout "Radical!", he continued, not shouting this time, to say "Yeah dudes that's who I am, the RADICAL Doctor", you could see saying this physically hurt the actor playing the Radical Doctor, like he actually groaned after saying this.

"Let's get to the RADICAS!" He once again shouted, hopping back onto his skateboard, which started to fly as "Don't Stop Me Now" started playing, with the Doctor singing along, with what appeared to be tears coming from under the sunglasses of the Doctor.

"Let's see what's on the agenda today bros" the Doctor says, unlocking the half hot pink, half neon green "RADICAS", walking into the Radicas it was obvious the place was a mess, clothing, skateboards, pictures with captions like "epic Nardole" and "scongo is in the Congo" cluttered the floor. The Console Room was painted in a lime green paint, it hurts the eyes to look upon it, the bookshelves were filled with comic books and what appeared to be NES cartridges, the chalkboard had equations scored out with big text saying "MATHS AND SCHOOL ARE FOR NERDS". The Doctor looking on the verge of throwing himself off a building then suddenly announced "We've got some time traveling to do dudes!"

The Doctor set off, flipping random switches, hitting random buttons, a monitor flashed the words 'Planet: Odiosis.'

The planet of Odiosis looked rather dry, the ground was grey, what trees there were leafless, from where the TAR- RADICAS, had landed, there was a giant dome, the only source of light on the planet, a long at the end of the path was a sign, that read "City of Noioso."

The City of Noioso is contained by a giant dome, large, gothic buildings stretching beyond the thick fog that covered the roof of the dome, said fog seemed to ordinate from the furthest point from the entrance.

"Do you have an appointment Mr...?" emotionlessly asked a blue, short red eyed alien, who was not just Nicholas Briggs with blue face paint and some cheap contacts.

"I just sort of floated through in my RADICAS, do I need an appointment?" replied the Doctor to the alien who definitely was in no shape, way or form Nicholas Briggs with cheap face paint, the alien looked displeased, almost disgusted by this comment, but still tried to keep a blank face, replying with "Yes sir, the great city of Noioso, capital of Planet Odiosis, winner of the intellectu estis landscape contest in the Borro galaxy, undefeated winner of the Odiosis games, requires entry to be on an appointment basis for tourists like yourself."

"Do you ever stop talking and just chillax dude?" replied the Doctor, probably not listening to a word the Odision gate manager said, the Odision looked flustered by this, more than flustered, angry, angry and distressed, the uncaring face slipping, but still replying, "You still need to make an appointment in advance sir, if you would please follow me to the tourist waiting room, then we shall try and get you an appointment."

The waiting room suited the rest of the planet, it was dry, other dusty seats and a table filled with magazines like 'Galaxy's most empty landscape paintings', 'Songs that make you feel relaxed and uninterested', 'The Odision Sun', and a 'Guide to City of Noioso, by the City of Noioso council', the room only had a normal looking desk, with a female Odision, who, with 100% certainty was not Nicholas Briggs in a cheap wig and a dress behind the desk, just writing things down, as well as a painting of the same waiting room.

“Please sit over here sir, take a ticket and wait for it to be called, thank you” The Odision gate keeper said as he was leaving the waiting room, locking the door behind him.

“This place is totally snoredonkulas” the Doctor said, not sounding too pleased, “Not a single epic meme, not a single in door skateboard park, not even a single pizza!” the Doctor shouted, the female Odision not even looking up from her writing, “Luckily I have my SONIC GUITAR, now available in stores for £249.99” the Doctor continued shouting, pulling a Guitar Hero Guitar with pieces of cable and a motherboard taped to it and started to play Through the Fire and Flame by Dragonforce at the door, the Odision still paying no mind.

And just like that the door unlocked, the Doctor took the guide and left to explore Noioso, the Doctor trekked through the streets of Noioso, if you ever went there you would think that it’s an industrial district in a Tim Burton film, the whole thing was just blacks and greys, not a single colour to be saw, passing by shops with names like ‘Noioso Shop 1’ ‘Noioso Shop 2’ ‘Lifestyle Express’ and ‘Sneed’s Feed and Seed’.

Eventually the Doctor made it to the ‘Lounge of the Great City of Noioso’, which, if it didn’t have a sign in front of it, you would guess that it was just a tower. When the Doctor entered the Lounge there was some piano music playing, long ago the Doctor would have recognised that it was Dmitri Shostakovich’s Waltz No. 2, but this transformed Doctor has purged his brain of such music.

“What’s with this snore fest of a party” shouted the Doctor, causing horrified gasps, and for the piano to stop playing “I’m here to shazam your... your wizam, ok no, that’s it, screw this, I quit” the actor playing the Doctor said, storming off set.

“But Peter, you can’t quit, you’re only half way into series 11!” said Chris Chibnall smoking a cigar on set which I’m pretty sure is illegal, but whatever.

“You expect me to put up with this bullshit? You’re running the damn character of The Doctor into the ground, last week you had me defeat female slutty cybermen by using my sonic guitar, which is an issue in of its self, to activate there cyber-period!” replied Peter Capaldi, screaming at the top of his lungs.

“Ok first off Peter, the cyberwomen were a very subtle critique of how technology oppresses wom-“

"I don't give a shit Chris, I'm done, you can watch me walk outside and burn this mistake of a costume, but other than that I'll make sure I never have to work with you again" Peter replied, flipping Chris Chibnall off for the last time.

Later, under the BBC offices, Chris Chibnall is seen praying to the original copy of Dimensions in Time, and asking for guidance, "Masters, Peter has quit, what can I do to kill Doctor Who" Chris begged to the copy, and just like that the spirit of JNT appeared, and said "Uhh, have Briggs film the rest of the Doctor scenes this season"

"But Briggs is already half the characters my mas-" "I have not asked for your opinion my servant, do this and we truly shall destroy Doctor Who once and for all" boomed JNT, Chris bowed and went to continue his and JNT's work, the world never knowing that Chris and JNT are working to destroy a British TV show.

End

Merlin's Way

by Gallifrey Immigrant

What if April from Class and the Merlin incarnation of the Doctor had an adventure together?

The first thing April noticed was his eyes. They were bright green, and sparked with extreme life. She noticed them first, despite the grime and muck covering his jacket. Or maybe those were robes? Whatever they were, they looked dingy. His bare feet left muddy marks on the concrete floor, as he paced around. People were ignoring him, the way people always ignore the homeless. His expression looked dazed, like he didn't know where he was.

But his eyes weren't normal.

April walked over to the man, and tried to ignore the stench coming off him. She placed a hand on his shoulder, and he turned to gaze at her.

Months of living in the body of a Shadowkin meant that the senses of the shadow never would really leave April. This made it harder to walk around, as April nowadays could never feel comfortable in full sunlight. But it also meant that she could sense the alien nature of others. In this man's eyes, he could sense a deep history, something impossibly nonhuman, despite his appearance. That made it the business of the "Bunghole Squad". (That was their name for the little band of friends who started protecting Coal School from alien threats. It wasn't her favorite, but it stuck.)

"Hello. I'm April. Are you alright?" she asked.

The man gave her a questioning look, and then said "Not quite. I may be alright."

"What's your name?" she asked.

"My name. Hmm. Merlin's my name, I believe," said the man. He threaded his fingers through his long, shoulder-length hair.

"Merlin? Like the wizard?"

"Yes," he said. He cracked a grin. "You think I may be mad, no? Perhaps you think that I think I'm the wizard himself, eh?"

"Do you think you're the wizard?"

The man frowned. "Maybe I do. Maybe I do."

He rifled through his pockets, pulled out a yo-yo, and shook his head. "I haven't cleaned my pockets in so long. Haven't had the time."

"I can get you to a shelter," said April.

"A shelter? I'm not homeless! I've just misplaced my home, temporarily!" he said indignantly. "It flew away!"

April tried to figure out how to reply to that. "Do you think your home will fly back soon?"

"...No," he admitted. He suddenly grabbed April's wrist, and exposed her forearm, revealing the long bluesish scar left from battling the Snow Centaur army last summer. April slapped his hand away, and was about to chastise him, when he caught a sadness in his eyes. He muttered "Centaur weapons leave that mark..."

"You've seen Centaurs before? How?" asked April.

"I...don't remember. I don't remember. Oh dear, she's taken so much," said Merlin. He turned away, looking at the floor.

"Taken what?" asked April.

"Memories. My life."

"Well, listen. I have friends, who deal with weird things like that. Maybe we can help you."

"Really?" asked Merlin. He turned back around, and cocked his head. "I can tell you've had encounters with aliens. You look too young to be UNIT. Are you a companion?"

“Companion? No...we’re the Bunch—the Coal Hill Defenders,” April announced proudly. “We protect the innocent from alien danger.”

“Interesting. I’ve never heard of you.”

“A lot of people haven’t. Kinda sucks, as we get no credit for saving everyone’s life, like, every week.”

“I know the feeling,” said Merlin. “But I’ve literally, in all my lives, never heard of you. Unless my memory’s even worse than I thought.”

“You didn’t have to say it twice”, said April. Then she added “You said, ‘lives’?”

“Yes. I regenerate, or used to. Not sure if I can now. I’ll cross that bridge when I get there,” said Merlin. He suddenly sat on the concrete sidewalk, and gestured for April to join him.

“Um..”

“What?” he asked innocently. “Don’t you want to chat? I’m too tired to stand.”

April nervously looked at the crowd of people glancing at the two of them. After a moment, she shrugged, and sat down in front of the man. With a closer look at him, she could tell that he was wearing not a coat, but what looked like robes. His hair, in spots where he wasn’t so dirty, looked fire-red. His smile was warming, and his eyes had a twinkle that reminded her of her ex-boyfriend, Ram.

“My, I haven’t seen modern technology in quite a while. Besides what I could make, he mused.

“Where are you from?”

“Gallifrey.”

“That’s a nice name,” said April. “Gally- fray. Never heard of it.”

“I haven’t seen it in a while. I miss it, sometimes,” said Merlin.

“You know, I was expecting you to say--”

“Camelot? Heh, if only. Would you believe me if I said I’ve been there?”

“I’ve heard of weirder,” said April.

He stared into his eyes. “I can tell. You’ve been touched by the cosmos. Been scarred by it, even. Are you sure you’ve never met the Doctor?”

“I’ve met him—well, I’ve met her...I’ve met the Doctor. He’s the one who gathered us together, at first, before leaving us alone to face down alien monsters. It’s turned out well, all things considered,” said April. She was lying, just a bit. Life hadn’t turned out well for Ram’s dead father, or the victims of the alien incursions of Coal Hill. She remembered when Tanya reamed out the Doctor when they last spoke to the Doctor, after battling the Cyber-priest:

Tanya: “How could you just go back into your blue box? That Metal woman just slaughtered an entire family, and all because you made an error!”

The Doctor was a skinny fellow in a brown coat then, with red sneakers and spiky hair. Kinda cute. But his eyes were filled with anger at the reply. April was still in the Shadow King’s body, so she could taste the Doctor’s angst. He replied: “I’m sorry for what happened. You think I wouldn’t trade places? I mess up. People die. That’s my life.”

Tanya rolled her eyes. “Typical privileged person. You sit with your angst, while other people screw up from your loss.”

Miss Quill stepped in. Holding Tanya steady, she said: “Everyone’s sad, everyone’s sorry, blah, blah, blah. Let’s give the man a break, shall we? We don’t have the time for the argument.”

The Doctor nodded. He locked eyes with April, who mouthed a “thank-you.” He seemed to appreciate it.

“Something wrong?” asked Merlin.

“No. Just remembering,” said April.

“I knew the Doctor. He’s the one who’s responsible for my current predicament, in a way,” said Merlin, smiling darkly. He drew closer, and added “Long ago, Gallifreyans

and a warrior race came into terrible conflict. It was conflict that affected time itself, wiping out whole civilizations. Thousands of small cities like the one we're in now were blown away, or taken from existence. It was so bad, that the Doctor had to do the unforgivable."

"What?" asked April.

"He destroyed both sides."

"Including your homeland?"

"Yes. He felt so bad, that it scarred his soul for ages. Across bodies, he felt the pain of having caused so much death. So one day, he went back and fixed it," said Merlin, clapping his hand for effect.

"That's good, right?" asked April.

"Good for Gallifrey, yes. But, not good for all Gallifreyans," he said. He paused, probably for dramatic effect. "You can't just wipe away bloodstains from a timeline, and get a clean slate. You lose things in the process. My timeline was irrevocably changed by that process. Originally, I was destined to become Merlin, and move to an alternate dimension, and become a helper to King Arthur. But the version of me, in this newly minted timeline, has a different path. It may lead to a Merlin, but not exactly the same one."

"So, what happens to you?" asked April.

"I do not know, my dear lady. I am adrift in a timeline not meant for me. Even my memories have faded," said Merlin. His face looked tired, so tired.

"Does the Doctor know?" asked April.

"Certainly not. And I wouldn't tell the Doctor. Saving Gallifrey was the right decision. But sacrifices are inevitable. I am not used to being the martyr, though," said Merlin.

April stared at the man. She wasn't sure what to say. She wasn't even sure if she believed him.

“What’s interesting, is that I am a very well-travelled man, yet I never heard of your Coal Hill Defense Squad,” he said. He raised his hand, stopping April’s objections with a smirk. “Let me finish. Seeing as I’ve never heard of you, either your group just happened to escape my notice until now, which is not impossible, but unlikely. Or, your group is a product of this timeline. A new alteration.”

“Is that a good thing? I mean, we’re not the best at saving the world. Sometimes we fail, really bad,” said April.

“Everyone fails at one point or another. But, still. It’s interesting how, as some possibilities are stripped away, new possibilities are added. Perhaps, it all works out,” said Merlin.

“I’d like to think so,” said April.

“Of course, maybe your team was just so unremarkable that you were completely forgotten,” yawned Merlin.

April opened her mouth to reply, but saw him wink. This man, wizard or not, was a jokester.

“Come with me. I have a place for you to stay,” said April, texting her mother to say she’d be late. “It’s a special room in a friend’s house. It’s where we keep weird alien stuff. No one will look in there.”

“Are you saying I’m a weird alien? Because you’d be right,” said Merlin. He looked up to the night sky. “It’s a nice night. I’m up for a stroll, I think.”

“It isn’t far. Unless you want to wait for the flying ship.”

He sighed. “S’pose not. The TARDIS is gone now, I fear.”

TARDIS?

“Wait, the Doctor--”

“Indeed. But that’s a conversation for another time, my dear April,” said Merlin, smiling. “It was nice chatting with you.”

Before April could respond, a loud honk from a car in traffic drew her attention. When she looked back, Merlin was gone.

A Burgpreppach Missive

by Judy

What if a wormhole at Tunguska contained a bizarre missive familiar to us?

Burgpreppach, February 31, 1755 N.A.D.

Dear Mr. John Locke, I hope you are doing well. I've been told the augmentation process is holding steady and you are about to be 130 years old, or some number like this, I still cannot wrap my mind on the calculations to convert between the old and the new calendar.

Since our last talk in Pimlico, some developments have occurred on the Tunguska ground zero.

The scientists are saying that for absolute certain, the increasing decay of our gravity is linked to the opening of the hell-gate, that is now called worm-hole. And that we may need another calendar in, well, months, if we still will call it that.

Some soldiers were able to reach the singularity and come back with some artifacts from the other side, but those objects crumble to dust within 40 minutes. We developed the new gelatin mimeograph to hold copies of books there were brought from there.

The cost of this experiment is growing high, all 34 soldiers that went there and back, died of scurvy. We sent some hobos also, but they stayed there.

In one of those copies of their books, I found some fragmented text that resembles Our Lord's English, and you will be amazed that the text is about human augmentation.

Our experts were not able to access if it is fiction or not, they say it is factual, maybe a diary or a journal, because they just count months in a different way we do, they call it seasons and episodes.

Since augmentation is your life's work, I hope it will be at least entertaining.

Yours Truly

General of III Prussian Cavalry

Immanuel Kant

Doctor Who Outlines – Season 10

Pre Credits Sequence (maybe minisode or flashback later)

"So I've been chosen to be her executioner?" Asked the Doctor.

-- note: his hoodie should be green now and his glasses should be a white-frame/blue-lenses Marc Jacobs, s.m.

Missy was standing in the center of a cuboid structure that would electrify her to death, her face was bitter yet defiant.

"Yes" said the black bald (diversity-quota-1/7) guy. "She deserves it, she violated the 77th law of the Shadow Proclamation twice."

"What if I just don't do it?" Said the Doctor, his long grey hair moving with in the wind.

"You are the only one of her species, do it now or suffer the consequences"

-- note: expand this with some in joke about the deaths caused by the doc, s.m.

The Doctor does some trickery and the process is halted. Missy is knocked out, but she is alive.

"Do you think, you can trick us, time lord?" said the black dude, raising something that looks like a gun.

The Doctor reacted and shot a blast from his sonic screwdriver. The black dude shimmers, he is in fact a hologram.

"You do not scare us, you're just a crazy old man. We cannot be killed, because we do not leave, we are quantum locked out of reality by the SP. I do believe that recently you had an encounter with another executioner of us, the black crow, and all your cleverness could not revert that permanently."

Doctor was baffled.

"Tricking us, only make your life harder. Now she is quantum locked with you, you and her cannot be more than 50 meters away from each other. It does include time travel and dimensional transcendently spaces." Black dude fades.

-- note: s.m. left the production, we will use some of his drafts and go along because of fall scheduling. c.b.

-- RTD agreed to give us some notes and tips

TARDIS new interior design, expanded area, have a grand white piano near the console controls. Have a Victorian bed for Missy and a military bed for the Doc with lots of Scottish tartans, very comfy. rtd.

Episode 1: Doc is a professor of philosophy in an university, Missy quietly attend to his nonsensical lectures.

New companion introduced, Bill Potts, black, lesbian, plain, ugly (it was an order from bbc headquarters so we will obey, but will kill her soon, lol) c.b.

Include gags about Doc and Missy have to enter the TARDIS together and he trying to fly the TARDIS without her inside it, make it like callback to Pertwee's first episode. rtd.

Introduce Season ARC about Black Holes breaking quantum locks. cb.

Episode one plot, make it light, about a lesbian lover and water or chips or something silly.

Keep in mind that it is to introduce new dynamic: Doc has to be 24h along with Missy, he will try to make her a goody. He will avoid leave Earth because of Missy, but eventually they will.

Nardole is around.

Episode 2, about emojis (fuck you headquartes, fuck you hard, cb.)

Episode 3, something icy and historical about a whale on the Thames, (add some racial antifa plot) (I do not wonder anymore why sm left.)

Episode 4 slot, free slot, call Lawrence Miles and ask him a draft, just don't be too grimy and voodoo linked please.

Episode 5

(This is good)

Doc goes to a space station. That breathing costs money, Capitalism in Space, could be the name. Work around it.

SM wanted to make the Doctor blind, but it is silly.

We will Kill Bill, make her float into space wearing a space suit.

(wait for pay off, cb)

Episode 6

Make the viewers confused, Bill is there in the uni as if she was not dead. Like as if the episodes were shown out of order.

The pope calls the Doc, all 4 go to Vatican.

In the end of the episode it is revealed that it was all a dream, but not, a holodeck computer simulation.

The computer Doc call the real one out of the simulation. IRL Bill still dead and Doc is grieving, even Missy shed a hid tear.

Episode 7

The Baddies of episode 6 attack, Doc enters into a coma, Missy and Nardole fight them. But Missy is still cruel and kill them to save Earth.

SM said the baddies should be Monks, but PLEASE be creative and do not reuse THE SILENCE design.

Include UN and Pyramids or something mythological. (no budget for UNIT tho)

In the end, it was all a simulation now in order to test Missy.

Include this quip from the Doctor: "The Monks ran away, in all their simulations they were could not win over your or me, so I used the last simulation on you."

Episode 8

(it was still linked to the monkies, wtf sm, stretching much? cb)

Free slot, make it to be Doctor, Missy, Nardole and River Song.

Have Jim Mortimore to write it. But PLEASE, not recursive or timey winey stuff.

Episode 9

Mark trying to emulate Pertwee Era. WTF WTF WTF, okay, lets do whatever he says.

Episode 10

(it was about Bill)

Make it about last chance of Missy's redemptions, she fails in the end again.

The Doc is totally devastated

Episode 11

Well, by now Capaldi asked to leave and to have an episode with the Cybermen from the Tenth Planet.

Here we go.

It is Mondas, 1950's. Mondas is almost equal to Earth, including its dates.

People are dying of cold and the cybermen tech is already in development

Episode 12

Imprint

Fly on the Moff AKA Moffat's Lament

by zoda

What if Moffat had writer's block?

The acclaimed, intelligent, sexy writer sat onto his big brown chair, a metaphorical throne holding all his genius for he couldn't carry the weight just by himself. His face had drooped, and showed all the age and wrinkles that dent the face of a frowning man. He was in in his pants, scratching himself. Nothing to do.

"Why do I feel so empty?" he motioned his head over to his five series of DVDs on his shelf, and the many awards he put behind them. He took another scratch, and sniffed his finger.

He pushed against his body and got himself up from the seat. The leather tore away from his meaty legs and when he looked back, he realised he'd left an imprint from how long he'd been sitting there.

He waddled over to his "writer's chair." This was his referring to a black office swivel chair set against a desk with a Luxo lamp and a typewriter. The writer collapsed onto it and wiggled his fingers.

Dracula, he think he'll do that. Yes, that would be nice. He pressed a few keys, but then paused. "Nothing was coming out", he thought. Literally, the page was blank.

He changed the ink cartridge with a fresh one, and begun again. He typed out his notes, but once again he found the page had nary a stain.

He smacked his head a few times. He must think, think of an idea, it can't be that hard. He beat his fists on the keyboard trying to register a thought. He took out his laptop and tried using word. He forgot he never paid for it. He tried using pen and paper like a peasant, but nothing was working.

He swivelled back to his DVDs. Five years of memories, five years of absolutely brilliant television, if I do say so myself. well, you can skip some of the middle years. And 'The Beast Below'.

The writer sighed, then he pouted. "I think I'll give that fat fuck a call" and he took out his 2005-era cell phone to begin typing.

Fly Me To The Moff 2: Moff Harder

by zoda

What if something inhibited the big times of an iconic showrunner?

The Doctor collapsed onto the grated floor, his hands were trembling. His face glowed with a golden sheen. He helped himself onto his feet and palmed the tears off his face. He could see a yellow dirt grow under his fingernails and he knew death was upon him.

"I don't want tuggo" he cried, his body burst into beams and rays of light only to be prematurely snuffed out. His hand and head blew off into dust, and a suit without a body flopped onto the metal ground of the TARDIS.

"Ah yes!, I'm a bloooody genius!" the charismatic and well-endowed writer exclaimed to himself. "I'm finally out of that block."

"Ah, quel dommage, my friend, I was hoping I'd have to replace you."

"You don't mean that you fat fuck," the Writer said to his infinitely inferior peer, and I bet you were expecting him to phone someone else. "anyway, how are you doing?"

"Oh, you know me, just finishing up the End of the World novelisation where I introduce the new queer disabled Muslim transgender Doc."

"Sounds good, fam" the sexual Panther's typewriter clacked away like the typewriter of a damn good author (which is what he is, BTW).

His friend continued: "So, I take it you'll be by my side during the book sign- GAHH!"

Over the phone the man's friend could be heard dropping to the floor like a fat baby.

"What is it? What happened?! ...Is it your diabetus again?!", the man had swiped his flip phone from the desk and put it to his ear.

"I THINK SOMEONE'S INHIBITING MY ENZYMES-" The man forgot to turn off his speakerphone and got a large earful of wobbly crying.

"What's that supposed to me- GAHH!!" The man collapsed to the floor, on top of his expensive red, purple, yellow, blue and green rug. The phone landed with him and shattered on his very large face.

The handsome, yet resilint genius tried push himself up from his expensive mahogany panels cushioned by some classy decor, but his body was failing and he couldn't carry the strength to do so. He saw his hand, as he landed back down to the ground, and it was fading. His right was the first to crumble into dust, then the compsure of the left began to fail. With a final, tearful breath, he proclaimed his genius once again with his last words of wisdom:

"Moff, I let you tuggo."

And with that he blew away into nothing.

The Pitch

by Hunter

What if the lore behind a certain pitch loomed a little bit too far?

“So, it’s about a man born from a sewing machine, who comes from a long aristocracy of technicians, mathematicians and scientists who are all weaved through this process of genetic engineering, and after some point quite farther along in the film it’s revealed that he was actually the first being to have ever existed, and he’ll be there till the heat death of the Universe.

“His name is the Other, and in his life he wove himself into the fabric of the Universe out of greed. He wanted to be everywhere at once, to help all people and be a God, but once he went insane, after knowing all things that all beings thought and felt, and knowing their pain, he jumped into the only thing that was there before him: the sewing machine.

“He was ‘reincarnated’ with the same strain of thread that created his previous body was made of, the same memories, and the same insanity that made his entire race write him out of their history books. This time he dies for good, and is called the Relic, and the remaining films I was signed on for will be about his body being reanimated by the beings that had a love-hate relationship with him. What do you think of these ideas, Mr. Brookhaven?”

He took a sip of his brandy, and looked up at the ceiling in thought. “I don’t, uh... I don’t think this will work out, Mr. Smith. It sounds too... familiar.”

The Transgender Companion meets The Canonical Non-Canon Doctors

or

“Why do I wish to be Julia Sawalha when I'm a straight biological male currently seeing a doctor for gender issues? “

by Broken Mirrors

What if the Doctor(s) found out their companion was transgender?

And now, for your further enjoyment, the Doctor finds out his companion is transgender, non-canon edition!

Dr. Who: “Ehm, what did you say? No, no, that's not very likely, my dear. You couldn't possibly be born differently. Oh, my word!”

Fatal Death 9: “Oh, my dear, as though I didn't know. As though I haven't known all along. I love you whether you were born a man, a woman, or a haemovore. I would love you whether you were passing for female or passing for humanoid. Ours is a romance unbound by the foolish prejudices of old earth, a love fit only for the future, and for the cosmos.”

Fatal Death 10: “Oh, let me tell you, baby, that doesn't change a thing. Fetch a bottle of chardonnay, I'll demonstrate for you some of the tricks I picked up in my Manussan Snake-handling days.”

Fatal Death 11: “You are? Well then.. I guess that explains how we could be having this conversation.”

Fatal Death 12: “Oh, don't be ashamed, darling. You used to be a boy, I used to be a slack-jawed git. We're all beings of change, though... some of us a bit more than others, eh darling?”

Fatal Death 13: “What, you too? That blast must have been more extreme than I thought. Oh, you mean the whole time? Ha, what a girl! I knew I fell in love with you for a reason. Listen, when we get out of here, there's something very important I have to show you about the sonic screwdriver, I've developed a wearable harness for it that's just marvelous...”

Shalka 9: “Are you? Bully for you, dear. Can't be easy being a transwoman in your time. Then again, I suppose most things aren't easy in your time. Phones, directions, mind-uploading. But I'll tell you what, in four years there's going to be a website where you can be mad at everyone, now won't that be marvelous?”

The Ballad of SO, HOW'S SHIT TRIPS 2.5 PROGRESS COMING ALONG?

by Everyone Who Immigrant Pestered For A Damn Fic

What if a poet pontificated on the process of producing this portfolio?

"Contribute!" begged the author,

But I was all out of ideas.

Nought my brain was wrought for,

Amidst all the volunteers.

He had scored fourscore and four more,

Fanfic antics from his peers.

And that's enough, for sure-sure,

I could rest my writing gears.

The Tripcode Squad

by Art Degree

What if some titular shit trips of /who/ were a Time Lord special forces squad?

Hand-picked from every branch of the Gallifreyan military...

Consented to mind-wipes, giving them no memories of their lives before training...

Known not by their names, but their chosen titles...

Formed to be completely expendable...

When the going gets tough, (or if the Doctor is currently unavailable), Gallifrey High Command sends its own ragtag bunch of misfit Time Lords to deal with it.

Whether it's blowing up a Dalek station, demolishing a Cyberman factory, or even the complete annihilation of a local chip shop which called chips "fries", you can always bet on Gallifrey's Finest Pieces of Work:

THE TRIPCODE SQUAD

"And to think you all wanted to stay indoors, mate!" the Ranger shouted as he ran through the corridors of Station 4.C, Daleks screaming "EXTERMINATE!" all the while.

"This isn't what I expected when you said a 'good night out', Ranger!" the Highlander shouted back as she ran behind him, swinging her beam saber at Daleks, left to right.

"She's right, Ranger. I would've preferred we've done something else, like write," the Immigrant said over their earpieces, "or at least told us what the hell you meant by a big night out before you put us on the transport." The Time Lord looked at the monitors in the station's security systems. "Watch out, there's a few metalheads to your left, I got them," he said, hacking the security turrets against the Daleks.

“Gotcha,” the Ranger said. “Anyways, it’s not my fault if Ollistra wanted us to destroy the station. Immigrant, find anything?”

“Yes, there should be an exit to the main engines to your right.” The Immigrant presses more buttons on his tablet, bringing up two screens from head cameras. “Song, Brush, you guys okay?”

“Does it look like we’re okay?!” the Song yelled as he continued to shoot at Daleks. “Brush and I are pinned down at the hangar, I repeat; we are pinned down at the hangar!”

“Alright, alright,” the Immigrant replied, bringing up another screen. “Let’s see... Cat, can you get there in time?”

“Can do,” the Cat replied. Dropping down from the vents, he stands up, a small squad of Daleks in front of him. Cracking his knuckles, and with a motion of his fists, he activates his secret weapons: electric gauntlets designed to shock a Dalek dead, the Arcadia-Underhill Time-Infused Shock Maulers.

“Let’s get dangerous.”

“So yeah, then I told Lander that Space Naruto was the gateway Eastern Gallifreyan animation of the worst kind, and-“

“Brush, is this really relevant?” the Song interrupted.

“I’m sorry but I thought that we were having a real bonding moment here,” the Brush replied with mock indignation, throwing a grenade over the currently-upturned container that he and the Song were using as cover. “Where’s Cat anyway?”

“Probably taking his sweet time,” the Song said, firing more shots from his rifle. “Maybe hoping that he’d be too late.”

“He’s just busy,” the Brush said. “We’re in the middle of a warzone, after all.”

“Oh I can hear it now: Oh no, I was too late to save them, there was just too many Daleks, poor him.”

“In his defense,” the Brush said as he reloaded both his revolvers, “You were kinda getting overboard with your crush on Major Jess.”

“Hey, the heart wants what it wants,” the Song said, as he checked his watch. “Tsk, takin’ his sweet time.”

“He’ll be here, trust me,” the Brush said. He put a finger on his earpiece. “Immigrant, how goes our evac?”

“It looks like the three are busy.”

“GET THE BLOODY DALEKS OFF MY GODDAMN TAIL!”

“You try aiming while you keep doing those damn barrel rolls, Ringer!”

“Aileron rolls, Blade, aileron rolls,” the Wanderer said, firing at the chasing Daleks. “Two ships dead ahead.”

“I see them,” the Blade said, aiming the large cannons in front. “Clear to fire?”

“Not yet,” the Bellringer said. “Pull the lever, Blade.”

“What lever?”

“That one, and pull it again when I give the signal,” the Bellringer said, pointing at a lever to Blade’s left. “Wanderer, activate the de-mat. I’ve got an idea.”

“Aye-aye,” the Wanderer said as he pushed some buttons. Immediately, the Battle TARDIS dematerialized, the Daleks chasing them zooming past where it had been.

“Pull it!”

The Battle TARDIS rematerializes, the Daleks and the battleships being directly in front of them.

“Clear to fucking fire,” the Bellringer said with a grin.

The Blade smirks, pressing the fire button.

BOOM!

“And that’s how you do it, boys,” the Blade said smugly.

“Don’t get cocky, there’s still more of ‘em,” the Wanderer reminded him.

“Alright, alright. Switching to machines... now.”

The guns on the Battle TARDIS immediately morphed, from the large launchers to smaller caliber, but faster firing machine turrets.

“Fire at everything that isn’t us,” the Bellringer ordered the other two Time Lords as he opened comms. “Song, Brush, how’s our LZ?”

“LZ clear, you should see the amount of Dalekanium, the mace was a good call by Cat,” the Brush replied. “We’re just waiting for Lander and Ranger.”

“And where the hell are they? We’re already way behind schedule.”

“We’re at the engine room,” the Ranger replied over the comms. “Lander, watch the door, I set up the charges.”

“Yes, mum,” the Highlander replied, holding her beam saber in front of her, ready to deflect incoming Dalek fire. “You done?”

“Almost,” the Ranger said, adjusting the temporal implosion generator. “Alright, let’s go, they’re waiting for us at the hangar.”

“Mmm,” the Highlander said, deactivating her beam saber. “Say, Ranger...”

“Yeah?”

“We ARE gonna talk about it, right? I know that Ollistra told you that we could’ve declined this mission.”

“Ah,” the Ranger replied. “When we get back, I promise.”

“I’ll hold you on to that,” the Highlander said with a smirk.

“Of course you will,” the Ranger replied with a smirk of his own.

“You guys know that the comms are on, right?” the Cat said into both their earpieces.

“Just get outta there so we can go home,” the Immigrant said, “I’m getting hungry, and Brush said it’s his treat.”

“Fuck off, I didn’t say shit.”

Onboard the Battle TARDIS, the nine Time Lords watched the screen, Station 4.C on it.

“So are we blowing it up or what?”

“Patience, Blade, patience,” the Ranger said. “Immigrant?”

“Activating the imploders... now.”

The station suddenly let out a violent boom. For a few seconds, it was eerily silent.

Suddenly, a small warp appeared in the center of the station, sucking everything all around it: the station, every Dalek, every Dalek ship.

Five seconds. Then nothing remained.

“Alright,” the Wanderer said with a smile, “go team.”

“What now, Ranger?” the Bellringer asked.

“Now?” the Ranger replied, thinking what to do. “I dunno, wanna stream something?”

The other eight looked at each other, and with a collective shrug, they nodded.

“What are we streaming?” Blade asked.

“Claudia Boleyn,” he replied with a massive grin.

A massive groan echoed in the room.

END

Nardoles All The Way Down

by Gallifrey Immigrant

What if one Nardole wasn't enough?

Honore. Emily.

One was a dark-skinned soldier from New Orleans. The other is a mysterious young woman with amnesia.

The two were a team, each with special abilities involved with time. Honore had the ability to perceive people's timelines, as "time-worms." Emily was a channeler, who had the ability to travel through time. Combined, they use their abilities to help people that they encounter, fixing evils that they encounter across time and space. Hopefully, while getting paid for it.

This is one of their stories.

This planet wasn't the weirdest place Emily and Honore

"Good morning! I'm Nardole the Twenty-Fifth," said the man cheerily. He had a round face, and was wearing a Christmas hat. Actually, he blended in rather well with the environment, which overall was filled with red and whites and smiley-faces. Emily figured the place was supposed to brighten up the spirits, and it would have, except that the man she was looking at had died on Earth, which was apparently a different planet.

She looked at Honore, who was staring at Nardole with a look between horror and fascination. She nearly giggled at his expression. Perhaps because she had amnesia, and everything was new, Emily wasn't as bothered by the weirdness that the two encountered in their job as time-traveling detectives. For her, it was the only life she knew.

For Honore, it was a big shift from his previous life as a soldier. He had been a killer then, and suffered emotional trauma that he might never heal from. He'd never admit it to her, but she knew that it bothered him all the time, and he thought of this job as a sense of redemption.

“Um, do you want to meet the other Nardoles?” Nardole the 25th asked. He was jumping on the spot a little, and she could tell he was excited. Honore looked at Emily, who shrugged.

“Alright. Are these Nardoles part of a group, or...,” asked Honore.

“You're not a Nardole?” asked Nardole. His eyes went wide, and he stared at them like they were an alien. Which, technically, they were.

Before they could answer, a young boy walked up to them. He looked remarkably like Nardole, with the same white hair although his eyes were brown. Emily guessed they were related. He had a big 785 on his shirt.

“Hello, you two. Meet Nardole the 85th. He's pretty young, but he's still rather sharp,” said Nardole the 25th. Emily detected a warmth coming from his voice, and had the feeling they were brothers.

“Who are you?” asked Nardole the 85th.

“I'm Honore. And this is my friend Emily,” said Honore, holding his hand out to shake, which the child did. The fact that a child had shown up seemed to relax Honore immediately, even if both these Nardoles were strange.

The Nardoles both seemed disturbed slightly by the names.

“You've got dark skin,” said the older Nardole. It wasn't said with any malice, but Emily could still feel her gut turn, and she could see Honore's arm tense up slightly.

“Ah, it's just a tan,” said Honore gruffly, his mouth turned in a dark smile.

“I've never seen a tan that dark, except in the history pictures,” said the younger Nardole.

It took a second for Emily to realize he was serious. Where exactly were they?

The younger Nardole suddenly walked closer to Emily, and peered at her cleavage from her pink shirt. He stared for several seconds, and Emily had to clear her throat to catch the boy's attention. The boy was about to say something, then scurried over to the older

Nardole, whispering something in the older man's ear. The man pursed his lips, and frowned.

“Sorry for that,” said the older Nardole. “We've never seen a Nardole model with young hair, and a protruded chest, or tanned skin like that, before.”

Protruded chest? Neither of them had seen breasts before? Emily looked at Honore, who was currently carrying the blank expression he used whenever the situation had gone completely beyond his ability to comprehend. It was a frequent expression of late.

“How many Nardole models are there?” asked Honore.

“Only one or two. Occasionally, there are outliers, like Nardole the 85th . He's got brown eyes, but I think it's cute. Other Nardoles, however...”

“They bully me!” shouted the younger Nardole. “Every Nardole look the same, except for me!”

“Do you want to see the other Nardoles?” asked the older Nardole.

Five minutes later, Emily and Honore were surrounded by a crowd of Nardoles. They were all clones of Nardole. Some were wearing a builders' clothes, some were on the phone, some were busy talking to Nardole children, some were wearing glasses, and one was wearing nothing. The nude Nardole was soon carried away by a Nardole in what Emily assumed was a police outfit, and was screaming “It shouldn't be wrong. We all look alike!”

Each Nardole had a number on his clothes (except for the arrested Nardole, who had it spray-painted on his butt-cheeks). Nardole the 25th explained that this number helped them identify each other. Occasionally, a Nardole was produced from the birthing machine with a mutation, like Nardole the 85th. His brown eyes marked out him out among the other Nardoles.

“Recently, there's been more and more mutated Nardoles coming from the machine. It's my problem, because it's my job to maintain the machine. If these mutations keep on coming, well, there will be unrest,” said Nardole the 25th .

“Is it really that bad if not everyone looks alike?” asked Honore.

“Not according to me. But there are those among us who think only “pure” Nardoles belong here. Especially Nardole the 615th. One of the oldest of us, he came from the last birthing cycle of Nardoles,” said the older Nardole.

“He wears a fake beard. It looks creepy,” said the younger Nardole. He was holding onto Emily's sleeve, and she patted his hairless head. Despite the fact that he was a clone, Emily saw that the boy didn't realize anything was odd about the society, or that there were several kids that looked just like him.

“That's typical. A society where everyone looks damn alike, and people still find a way to be racist,” huffed Honore.

“What's 'racist'”? asked the younger Nardole.

“I'll tell you when you're older, 85. Now, run along back home. Your parents will be worried,” said the older Nardole. The younger Nardole hemmed and hawwed, but eventually walked away, further into the town.

“Why are you really here?” asked the older Nardole suddenly, his voice more serious. His eyes switched from Emily and Honore.

“Just got lost along the way,” said Honore.

“Poppcock! There's an energy shield over this whole town. No one has been in or out for years. Most Nardoles don't know there is anything out there. If I hadn't read the history books, I wouldn't know. But I know enough to know only extremely advanced technology could get into this planet. So, how did you get in here?” said the 24th.

Emily sighed. Here was the hard part. She and Honore would have to explain that they were time travelers, and then get arrested, or used as scapegoats, or considered insane. And this Nardole seemed smart enough to look through any lie told to him.

“You wouldn't believe us if we told you--” started Honore.

“Are you time travelers?” asked 24.

Honore blinked, and said “Um, well, yes.”

“Wonderful! The First Nardole mentioned meeting a time traveler in his journals. Do you have a TARDIS?”

"No," Emily said.

"A Delorean, then?"

"Nope. Honore, what's a Delorean?"

"Any sort of time machine?"

"We don't use machines. Honore shows us where to go, and I help us go there," said Emily.

"Oh, alright. Anyway, do you want to go to the birthing place? Check it out?" asked the 85th Nardole.

"Sure," said Emily and Honore. They might find some clues about the deaths they were researching there.

The "birthing place" was a large castle. Inside, there were a lot of gears turning about, and there were other Nardoles working on the machines. Emily was reminded of the machines in some of the science fiction books Honore hid under his bed (though he'd never admit to them.)

On the top of the large station was a large light. It bled into red light onto the ground, and smoke was emitting from it.

"Is that supposed to be happening?" asked Honore.

"No," said Nardole the 25th . He ran into the castle, with Emily and Honore following behind him.

Right before she walked inside, she thought she heard the sound of the younger Nardole's voice. But what she saw when she walked inside soon captured her attention.

There was a man defacing the castle. He was ripping apart cables, and laughing maniacally.

"Excuse me, who do you think you are?" asked 85.

The man paused, and turned around.

“What the fuck?” said Honore.

This man, if you could call him a man, wasn't a Nardole. Or rather, he was a bunch of Nardoles smooshed together. He had three eyes, and the side of his neck had a fully functional Nardole mouth. His head, bald like all the other Nardoles, was large and blotchy, and his waist had protruding toes coming out of it. The tattered clothes he wore seemed to not fit his body, possibly due to the extra arm coming from his block.

“Me am a Nardull. Nardull 0,” said the abomination, lifting up his shirt to reveal a “0” cut into his chest.

“Oh, dear,” said 85.

Nardull 0 charged at them. Honore raised his gun, and shot at the man. The man laughed at the shots, and kept on waking.

“Me am enhanced. Me am pain-resistant!” said the creature. He grabbed Honore, and threw him to the ground. Turning to the other two, both the mouths on his face and neck smiled evilly.

“Enhanced? By whom?” said 25.

At that point, Emily noticed someone behind him. A blonde-haired man staring at them, with a grin on his face. There was a dark malicious energy radiating from him, and a look of an ancient monster in his eyes.

Honore made a shocked noise. His face was filled with fear, and he nearly stepped back. “You’re like the Doctor.”

“Well, yes. Except not,” said the man. “You can call me..the Nilso Master.”

Marcelo's Last Goodbye

by Looms

What if Marcelo Camargo had a secret he would take to his grave, and it is discovered?

A few years ago known leaker Marcelo Camargo was apprehended by the BBC secret police. He was chained and placed in a safe before being dumped at the bottom of the Atlantic.

Years later a team of specially trained divers were sent to recover the safe after it appeared Marcelo might have knowledge of a cache of lost episodes in the Mongo-lian desert.

When they brought the safe to the surface and opened it they were amazed. The safe was empty apart from the chains used to bind him and a note.

The mere sight of what was written on that paper drove many to madness. And to this day only few people know what it said. Some theorize to this day that it was the word of god and that Marcelo was some sort of messiah.

I can't tell you who wrote that note, or even what it means. But I can tell you what the note said.

It said

t.nilso

The Greatest Nilso in the Galaxy

by Anon

What if Nilso's love of the Seventh Doctor drove him down a dark, dark path?

once upon a time, nilso kidnapped mccooy. he couldn't get the smell out of his van for weeks.

the end

Question-Mark Umbrella

by Anon 2

What if Hemingway had penned a tale about our dear Nilso?

For sale: question-mark umbrella. t. nilso

Hills Like the White Elephant in the Room

by Neo

What if two Londoners visited Korea?

The mountains around Seoul were tall and white. A train station and street of bars fell in the shade of one of them. The English man and woman sat at a table outside one of the quieter bars. It was a cold afternoon after a morning snowfall, and the train would come in twenty minutes. It stopped at this station for five minutes, then went onto the destination of the English visitors.

"What should we drink?" the man asked. He adjusted his cap, bringing it further down his face.

"You tell me," the woman said.

"Let's drink somaek."

A moment passed.

"Don't make me order it."

"You're the expert here."

The man tugged on his cap and called out for somaek in stilted, clumsy Korean.

An older lady brought out two big glasses, two shot glasses, two bottles of beer, one bottle of soju, and a pair of metal chopsticks. The glasses were empty, without ice.

The man thanked her in English, then thanked her in Korean. He poured beer into each of the big glasses, then soju into each of the shot glasses. He tipped the shot glasses into the big glasses, put one chopstick in one of the big glasses, then hit it with the other chopstick. The drink fizzled weakly. He hit it again.

"I know how to do it, alright?" said the man. He repeated the same maneuver in the other glass, then waited for the woman to drink first.

"It's nice," she said.

"It's very popular here."

"You learned that-"

“On the Internet, yes.”

“I’m glad you were excited to come here. It’s so good to see you outside.”

The woman put her drink down and slipped off the slick perspiration on her index and middle fingers with her thumb. The man flinched.

“My baby boy,” the woman said. “It’s really an awfully simple operation. It’s not really an operation at all. Everyone gets it done here.”

“Everyone? Really? Really?”

“You know what I meant. Plastic surgery.”

The man drank his somaek quickly. He made himself another, then drank that too.

“Petal...”

The man did not say anything.

“I’ll go with you and stay with you all the time.”

“Then what?”

“Then we go home and you don’t have to worry about this ever again.”

“What if it doesn’t work?”

“It’ll work.”

“What if they can’t do it?”

“They can.”

“What if someone finds out?”

“They won’t.”

“What if they can’t fix it?”

“They don’t have to fix it. They just have to cover it.”

“What if-”

“Then we’ll do something else. You can’t live like this.”

The man drank some more. When the woman didn't return to her drink, he drank that too.

They didn't speak until the train started pulling into the tracks. At the sound of the train arriving, the man spat an ice cube into his glass.

"We should go," the woman said.

"Okay."

"Do you feel better?"

"I feel fine. There's nothing wrong with me. I feel fine."

Framing Story: Part 5

Think of the Children

by Neo

“Okay, before we watch this next one Gwen, I feel like I gotta warn you.”

“Oh Jack, why did you have to stop? I was properly watching by now.”

“You were? That’s great! What was that last one about?”

“I was just thinking about how it’d be to have a nice cup of tea and a think over that one. You know, it kind of reminded me of-”

“You got those last two were referencing Hemingway, right? Ah, Hemingway...what a firm grip he had. What a man - a man’s man!”

“Jack, you interrupted me. Again.”

“Oh. Sorry.”

“Well, what were you gonna say about this one then? Get it over with.”

“Let’s just say I’ve happened to see this story before, and it’s very...graphic. Extremely graphic. Definitely not for the under-eighteens out there.”

“I’m a big girl, Jack. I’m sure I’ll cope.”

“I’ll say it again - this story is extremely graphic. Not for the squeamish.”

“Well, why are you putting the tape in if you don’t want me to watch it?”

“Oh, we’re watching it alright. I just thought I should warn you first.”

“Okay, okay, warning taken, if it’ll shut you up...”

Mind Blown

by S. Kelly

What if you, dear reader, had your mind blown by where this stories that defies explanation goes?

"I'm home, Addy!"

A young man entered his apartment, taking off a bandana wrapped around his forehead.

"Addy! You're back!"

Another young man got up from the couch, ran towards the door and welcomed him with a kiss.

"I missed you..."

"I've only been gone 9 hours, Addy..."

"I know, a whole 9 hours!"

They both laughed.

"Y'know, Addy... I'm so glad my life ended up this way. Even though I'm not on the TARDIS anymore, I hardly miss it because being with you is just as exciting!"

"Aw, Addy..."

The two hugged each other tightly.

Late 2012. A homeless Adam Mitchell entered a London back alley, not sure where else to go. Accepting defeat, he lied down on a damp piece of cardboard to rest for the night. He shut his eyes, having no plans for tomorrow.

BANG

A bright flash engulfed the alley. Adam jumped up in fright. Once he had come to, he couldn't believe what he was seeing.

A man had appeared out of nowhere. A young man, with moppish brown hair. He was cowering on the ground, holding a piece of rope.

Adam stood silent for several seconds, not sure what to do - should he run? Was the guy hurt? Should he say something?

While he was thinking what to do, the young man slowly started to move.

"H-hello..."

"Hey..."

"This might sound peculiar, but... where am I?"

"London..."

The young man continued to stare, as if he was expecting something more.

"...2012?"

He suddenly snapped out of his confusion, and begun talking to himself.

"Of course, the black box protection system! Any living thing on the bridge was transported to a safe location nearby! But since the Cyber technology was interfering, it sent me through time as well!"

While the boy was talking to himself, Adam found himself staring. Whether it was hearing someone else so young talk in such technical terms, or his attractive youthful appearance, something about this guy was catching his attention.

But how young was he, exactly?

"Um... Sorry, just wondering, how old are you?"

"20."

Phew, I'm not a pedo, Adam thought.

"...Why do you ask?"

"Oh, uh, no reason." Adam quickly changed the subject. "My name's Adam, by the way".

"I'm Adric. It's a pleasure to meet you, Adam!"

Adric grinned and held out his hand. Adam stared for a couple more seconds, before remembering he was meant to shake it. He giggled nervously. He hadn't felt this way about another guy since high school - he had been trying to make things work with a girl

for the sake of his mother, but since he had been kicked out, that wasn't really an issue anymore.

When Adam came back from his trail of thought, he noticed that Adric was now staring into his eyes as well.

"So... Uh... what are you going to do now?"

"I'm not really sure... Honestly, I was expecting to be dead by this point. I don't suppose The Doctor would ever know to look for me here..."

"Did you just say... The Doctor?"

"Oh, have you heard of him?"

"I met him once! Back at my old job in America. He took me on a trip to the year 200,000, but... we decided to part ways."

"That's incredible, I travelled with him too! There's so much we could talk about!"

Adric was brimming with excitement. The two boy geniuses had bonded instantly. Adam had given up, but meeting someone just like him had given him newfound motivation to keep going.

"Hey, so I was thinking... I'm guessing you don't have anywhere to go, and I'm kind of in a rough spot too... But I've got some money in the bank - I could rent a place, do you want to... y'know... stay with me? It'll be easier for both of us if we worked together..."

"That's a good idea... I like that!"

"Great! Cool, haha,"

Adam was trying hard to contain his excitement.

"Well there's nothing we can do before sunrise... I've got some spare room on my cardboard if you wanna come sit down..."

Adric sat down next to Adam on his damp cardboard bed. The two spent the night bonding over their exceptional intellects, and sharing stories about their times with The Doctor.

Adric and Adam were still hugging each other in a tight embrace. So tight, in fact, that they could both feel the other's pulsing erect penis pressing against their leg.

“I can feel that,” Adric said smugly.

“Well, what are you going to do about it?”

Adric grinned slightly, before moving in for the kiss. Their lips pressed passionately, tongues intertwined. Adam started caressing Adric’s ass, while Adric put his hands inside Adam’s pants and went straight to playfully teasing Adam’s penis.

Adam was getting extra aroused by how good Adric smelt. He had shown Adric how to use deodorant, and it was paying off.

Adam spun Adric around, pushed him against the wall and started grinding against him. Adric exhaled deeply in response, pushing back into him.

Adam then moved in to take Adric’s pants off, exposing his erect cock. It was so erect that the veins had become prominent and thick, giving his shaft a bumpy texture.

While he did this, Adric spun back around, dick flopping around and leaking precum, pushed Adam against the opposite wall and took his pants off as well. His penis was just as veiny, and a thick strand of precum was dripping down the shaft.

As they were making out some more, they started pushing each other through doorways, bumping against furniture and walls, and gradually made their way to the bedroom.

During this chaotic process, they had each taken off the remainder of the others’ clothing, and their bulging cocks were fully exposed to each other. All was taken off except Adric’s socks, since he liked to keep them on.

Once they were standing by the bed and ready to take things further, Adric interjected.

“Wait, let me get the ruler”

Adric picked up a ruler from the bedside table, and placed it bone-pressed up against Adam’s erect penis.

“Pull the foreskin back Addy, no cheating!”

“You do it.”

Adric complied, sensually pulling back Adam’s foreskin until the entire head was visible. He kept a firm hold on the shaft to prevent the throbbing from interfering with the measurement.

“6.78 inches, that’s a new record! We’ll have to put this to good use now, won’t we!”

Adam smirked, eagerly anticipating what was about to come.

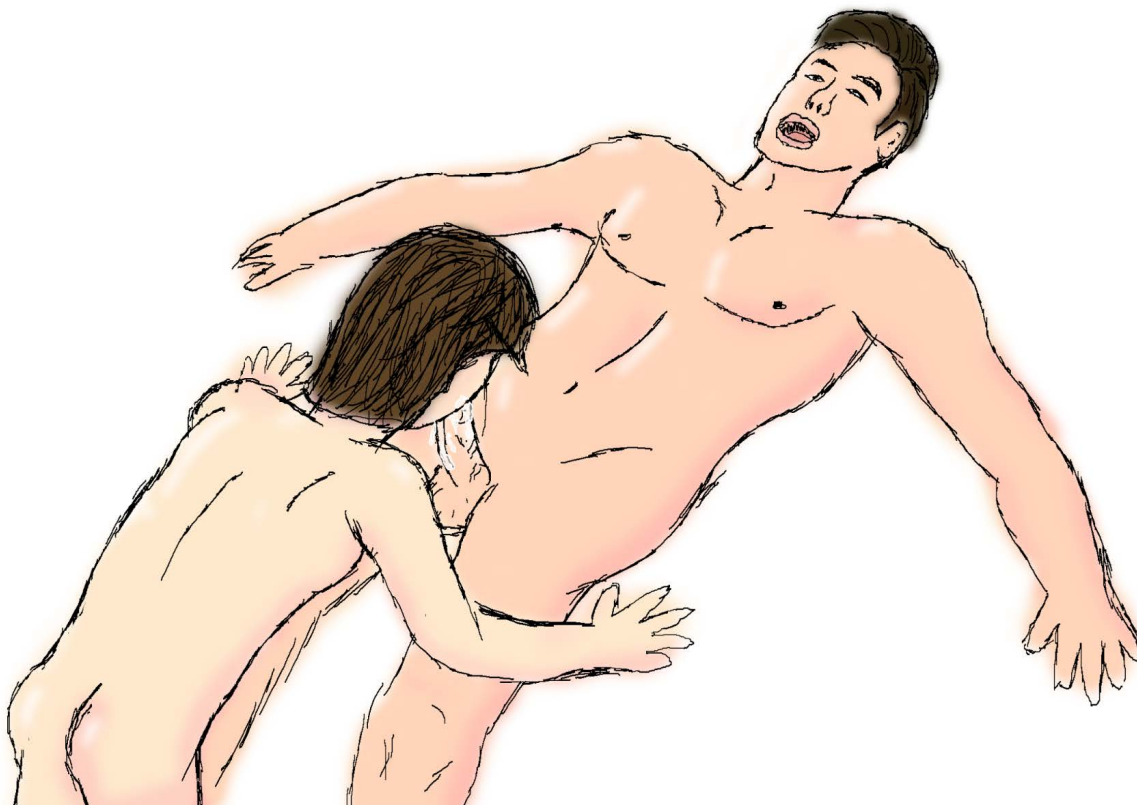
Adric pushed him onto the bed, then immediately followed him down.

Wasting no time, Adric started eagerly licking Adam’s shaft before inserting it wholly into his mouth.

Immediately he was filled with the sweet, salty taste of precum. It was so sweet it almost tasted like salted caramel, he thought. Adam’s cock had been dripping for quite some time at this point, so there was plenty of flavour.

Adric slowly moved his head up and down, gently massaging the shaft. His tongue moved around to tickle the head, giving him new doses of precum with each lick.

Adam couldn’t contain the pleasure - his legs were moving around slowly in response to the gentle stimulation. His moaning was slightly exaggerated, since he knew how much Adric enjoyed hearing it.



Usually Adric would stay at this pace for 10 minutes or more, but he couldn't help himself. He wanted more of Adam's cock, and he wanted it now.

Adric started going deeper and faster. he could feel the tip reaching the start of his throat, and he was enjoying every second of it.

So was Adam. His moans got louder and more intense - At this point, he didn't need to fake it. His entire shaft was being stimulated at once, causing an immensely pleasurable sensory overload.

Adam softly placed his hand on the back of Adric's head. Not pushing at all - he didn't need to - just feeling the motion.

Despite the intensity, Adric was able to continue like this for quite some time. He could have stayed like that forever, he thought. He got so much joy from it - the feeling of Adam's penis in his mouth, the taste of his precum, making his legs move around in response, the moaning, all of it.

The pressure kept building up, much more than it normally should, but eventually Adam hit the point of no return. He knew what was about to happen.

"Oh god I'm gonna cum, get ready..."

Adric took that as his cue to go even harder, just for the final few seconds.

Adam's legs jerked frantically while he let out a moan strong enough to distort radio frequencies in the area. He ejaculated with such intensity that the cum went straight down Adric's throat, causing him to choke. Adric pulled back from the shock, releasing Adam's penis from his mouth.

Spurt after spurt, warm, thick ropes of semen kept erupting, landing all over Adric's face, while he was still in a coughing fit. The force of ejaculation was so strong that some splashed back and landed in Adam's mouth too.

After what seemed like a whole minute, he finally finished ejaculating. All that was left was a slow dribble coming out of the tip. Adric went down for one last suck, cleaning up and swallowing anything that was left.

Once he had finished, he immediately went in to cuddle Adam - still covered in his semen.

They lied there silent for a few minutes, Adam slowly caressing Adric's chest, both trying to catch their breath.

Eventually, Adam broke the silence.

“Holy shit Addy, I had no idea you could do that! Not even the droids on satellite 5 were that good! Where did you learn how to do that?”

“When The Doctor wouldn’t let me on an adventure, I had a lot of time to practice on myself with TARDIS’ portal room.”

“Well it sure payed off!”

Adam looked down and saw Adric’s penis, still erect. He had been erect for over an hour by this point, and had produced so much precum that his entire shaft was glistening in the light.

“So what do you want me to do with that, then? After head that good, I feel like I need to do something really special in return.”

“Really special?”

“Anything.”

“Well...” Adric paused for a moment, to think if he should actually ask. “There is one thing I’ve been wanting to try for a while...”

“Yeah? What’s that?”

click

Adric snapped his fingers. The hole in Adam’s skull opened up, exposing his brain. Adam was taken aback.

“I’ve always wondered what it would feel like...”

Adam stayed silent. The look on his face made it clear that he wasn’t sure if it was a good idea.

“Are you sure about this? You’ve never been a top before...”

“I think I’ll be able to figure it out, Addy.”

Adam still looked hesitant.

“I did some calculations, and my estimation is that it would actually be quite pleasurable for you as well as me.”

Perhaps his judgement was clouded by still being horny from the thought of what he had just experienced, but a deal was a deal, he thought.

“...Yeah, okay, let’s give it a go. I guess it’s the least I could do after what you did for me!”

“Aww, thanks Addy!”

Adric hugged Adam, pressing their faces together, leaving a smudge of semen on Adam’s cheek.

After taking a deep breath, Adam shuffled down the bed, while Adric turned over on his knees to get in position. He hesitated slightly - It’s true that he wasn’t experienced in being a top, but he had studied what to do beforehand.

“Are you ready?”

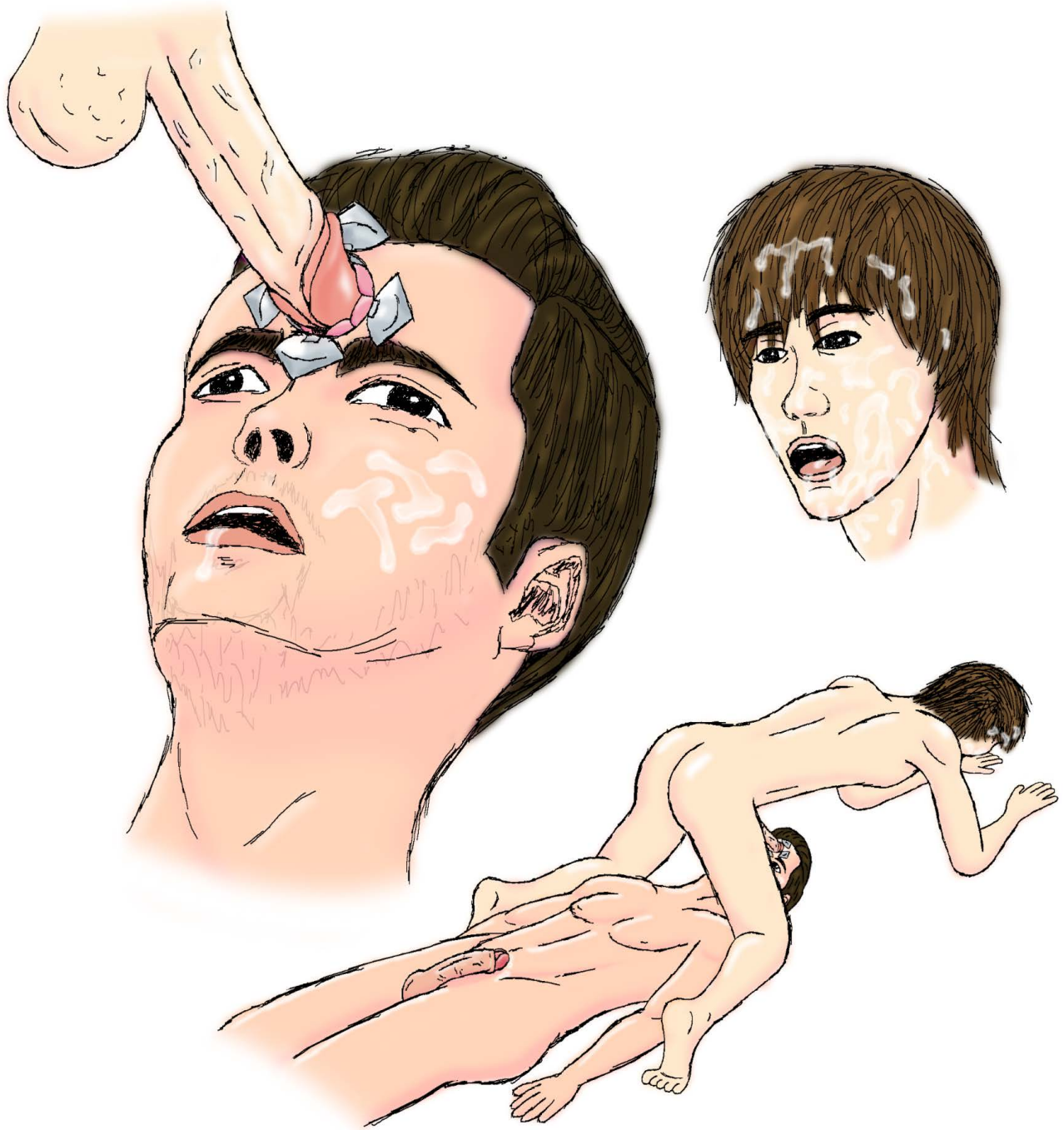
“Yeah, let’s do it.”

Adric raised one hand, placing it on his penis to keep it steady. 7.5 inches, he thought - he didn’t need a ruler, he could tell just from how it felt.

With the hand still steadying his penis, he slowly inserted it into Adam’s brain hole, sliding it in between the two halves of his brain. Adam’s eyes began to flutter, and his legs started to twitch in response to the brain being pushed.

After Adric had gotten his penis a few inches deep, he tried slowly moving back out. He could feel his foreskin coming back over the head, which felt so incredible he couldn’t help but moan.

Within a few attempts of rigidly alternating depths, Adric started to develop a rhythm of gentle thrusting. Foreskin gliding back and forth, penis slowly slipping deeper into Adam’s brain.



Adric had never experienced anything like this. The unique texture of the two halves of Adam's brain pressing against his penis was unforgettable. It was like a homemade onahole, but moist enough to make gliding back and forth incredibly easy - while still keeping enough pressure and friction to stimulate his entire shaft as well as the head. His head in particular was overwhelmed by the sensation of being in constant contact.

Adric tried his hardest to stay slow, for multiple reasons - he knew he should try and stay gentle for Adam, but he also wanted to make sure he didn't finish too soon. He had been horny for a long time now, and his penis was so sensitive that even a short burst of rapid movement would be enough to trigger an orgasm.

For as long as he could, he tried to savour it all - kneeling on all fours, the way his shaft felt as he thrust, and the immense pleasure that he could feel in his head.

But Adric quickly got lost in the feeling. Without realising it, his thrusting sped up, and his breathing intensified so much that he was starting to pant. He was so caught up in the moment that he had lost all hesitation and began violently thrusting back and forth. Immediately he felt the orgasmic juices starting to run through his legs. Writhing with pleasure, Adric let out a faint yet elongated moan as he began to ejaculate.

There was so much semen that it filled up all of the available space in Adam's skull, and started to squirt out of the hole and onto Adam's forehead. Adric counted the number of discharges, 16 in total - That was 4 more than his average, he noted.

Once his penis had finished twitching, Adric pulled it out of the brain hole, then laid down flat on the bed to recover. Even though he had only lasted no more than 5 minutes, he was exhausted from trying to maintain that position.

"Well, Addy? Was that as pleasurable as my calculations predicted?"

No response.

"Adam?"

Adric looked down. He wasn't ready for what he was about to see.

Adam was laying there motionless. His brain hole was filled to the brim with Adric's semen, overflowing and dripping down his face. But more importantly - several small, pink chunks were scattered across his face, originating from the hole. Tiny pieces of his brain had been excavated from Adric's aggressive thrusting.

Still in shock, Adric rushed to check Adam's pulse.

Nothing.

Adam was dead.

"Now I'll never know if I was right!"

Before Adric had a chance to process the gravity of the situation, a short, blonde woman wearing a light blue, rainbow accented coat burst through the door of the bedroom.

“Bloody hell! I’ve heard of a mindfuck, but this is ridiculous!”

Framing Story: Part 6

I Recommend You Condescend

by Neo

Gwen stared off into space as Jack removed the last tape from the player.

“That’s...that’s all of them from that crate then, yeah Jack? No more where that came from?”

“That one wasn’t even from the crate. The one before it wasn’t either.”

“Why did we...why did we watch those tapes then? Jack, I’m not sure I’ll ever be able to get those pictures out me mind.”

“Well, they were connected to the ones from the crate, didn’t you notice? That story in Korea was about Adam and his head implant too. Him and his mum, off to try and cover the hole with plastic, give him a new forehead. Wish I had one of those Vomit-O-Matics installed myself, truth be told.”

“Oh come on,” Gwen cried, “why’d you have to go and tell me that Jack? I told you I wanted a nice think about that one.”

“Hey, I’m just offering extra info. We’re just talking, Gwen.”

“It’s a bit different when you’re the bloody one choosing the tapes and putting them on.”

Jack put his hands up in mock surrender, then went off puttering around the room looking for more tapes. Gwen followed him.

“Weren’t you going to tell me what you remembered about this place after we watched those tapes? What’s going on? Why can’t I remember our teammates? How do we get out of here? Do have to watch every goddamn tape here?”

“Calm down. I promise, I will tell you more...but first, there’s something you have to work out for yourself. I can’t tell you what. We both need to keep watching these tapes, but you need to really, really think while we do.”

“Oh for Christ’s sake, Jack, why can’t you just tell me?”

“It’s something you need to realise on your own.”

“Can you at least tell me how many tapes are left before we can find our friends? Weren’t other rooms meant to unlock? A trapdoor, maybe?”

“About thirty more I’d say, but who knows how long they all are?”

“You?”

Jack just laughed.

“Don’t you laugh at me Jack Harkness!”

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry. Look, let’s watch these,” he said, waving around three tapes that looked to be in a set together, “then I’ll tell you more. Remember that. I’ll explain everything, but first, we gotta watch these tapes.”

Gwen sat down as the first of the tapes started to play, keeping Jack and his promises in the back of her mind as she watched.

Perfect Authentic Cadence

by Gallifrey Immigrant

What if Mary Elizabeth Winstead and Charlotte Gainsbourg were Doctors?

The Doctor waited for the bus of St. Altavista, which had been named after a patron saint of space transportation, though that didn't make it any faster. The greenish-sky of Mercury swirled around her, and she took a moment to look at the stars, trying not to count off the minutes. She had been waiting for the bus to arrive for two hours now, which was annoying her. Even when young, patience wasn't her strong suit, and the importance of this mission made her even tetchier. The diplomats of the Avvian system would like nothing more than to ignore her very existence, and she wouldn't put it past them to "forget" their meeting. She would normally run into her space-ship and make a quick jump to the Avvian headquarters, except that time-traveling ships weren't allowed in the area.

It wouldn't have stopped her predecessor. But her predecessor was dead, so what did they know?

Finally, Altavista's Bus came in. The headlight shone into her eyes, making her have to squint. The door opened, and she quietly walked up the stairs, her slightly oversized magician's outfit wrapped loosely around her body. It felt like a costume, and she began to wish she had taken more time to choose how to dress for this adventure. At least she had taken the time to brush her brown hair, which was in a simple bob cut. Her companion wriggled inside her pocket, peeking his furry head out.

"Is it time?" asked Miaki.

"Yes. Please be quiet for now," said the Doctor. She didn't want to attract unneeded attention due to the flying, talking mouse alien in her pocket.

The bus was emptier than the Doctor expected. The lights were dimmed down low in the bus, creating a radiant red glow throughout the place. There was a Judoon reading "Pride and Prejudice" in the front, and a few Foamasi gabbling between themselves. She felt out of place here, too human-looking. She could feel Miaki shifting in her pocket, looking around.

"I think they're in the back," Miaki said mentally to her. "Rather rude of them, to not meet us."

He was right. The Avvian diplomat, Heripo, sat comfortably in the back. He was smoking on a pipe, that reminded her of the "e-cigs" of the 21st century. (She tried not to think of it as her century. Miaki had told her that a Doctor couldn't be tied down to one place and time). It was clear that this diplomat was used to a life of leisure. She waved at him, and he frowned.

"Who the heck are you?" asked the diplomat.

"I'm the Doctor," she said. It felt weird on her tongue.

His eyes bugged out. Her mind could sense shock in his mind. It was probably due to having a different form than he was expecting.

"Are you? You seem different from your picture," said the diplomat. His green webby fingers rubbed at the frills on the front of his face. His eyes had no eyelids, and so gazed at her with a constant, uneasy glare that took her off guard. Her predecessor had warned her that aliens could look extremely different from human beings, but interacting in real life with a non-humanoid alien was a rush. (Miaki didn't count.)

"I can change bodies, if I get too hurt," replied the Doctor smoothly. She wondered whether she should sit or stand, and decided standing might be better. Leaning against the chair, she met his gaze. "Now, if you're done talking about my appearance, let's get to work."

"Of course," said the diplomat. He snapped his fingers, and the bus began to move. She fell to the floor, losing whatever dignity she had before. She quickly picked herself up. The Diplomat hadn't even offered to assist her once.

"The Venusian ambassador continues to ask for concessions from us. We obviously don't want any more conflict with the Venus empire, not after our last wars, but we're also not pansies. We are not going to *al grtha thuysa* ourselves for the benefit of an empire who has taken our resources before," said Heripo.

Out the side of her eyes, she noticed that the ship was flying far into space. The window's view rapidly drew away from the ground, the bus station becoming a speck.

She became uniquely aware of just how far she was getting from the TARDIS. It was very risky, going off somewhere unknown without a safety net. She had the faint memories of her predecessors to guide her, but that didn't seem like enough.

"Something wrong?" asked Heripo.

"No. Simply considering that not a century ago, the Venusians were just a backwater society on a random planet, and you were the incoming invaders," said the Doctor.

"Are you saying that the Venusians deserve to take us over?" he asked testily.

"No. I'm simply stating that perhaps the Venusians have a long memory. As do I, in fact. If you want me to help you, I need assurances you won't use my help to try to restore your imperialistic strategies," said the Doctor. She felt awkward here, trying to talk off the top of her head. But it didn't seem to show, thank god.

Heripo's mouth made a low growling noise, and for one irrational second, she thought he was going to eat her. But then he smiled, and said "Of course we will respect Venus's boundaries. We'll talk more, when we arrive at our destination."

The Doctor nodded, and relaxed into a chair. The bus moved along, and she closed her eyes, ignoring the psychic impressions from everyone else. Inside, she started to plan how she was to rescue Illithica once she got to the delegation room.

"Rest for now. You'll need your strength" Miaki told her mentally.

At first, it's just a cool autumn night on Earth. Cadence sits quietly, drinking alone.

A meteor, made of blue metal, blasted through the sky above. Streaks of lights cut through the shadow of the night time sky, nearly blinding Cadence when she tried to peek through the window. It landed with a loud thud, and the ground rumbled, spitting dirt onto her house from the impact. Cadence placed the beer bottle that she had been drinking down, and quickly ran outside. The air had become warmer from the impact, so that she was sweating as she approached the weird blue box in the field outside.

Someone pushed a door on the box open, and stumbled slowly out the box. Cadence didn't recognize the person, who had soot covering the face like paint. As Cadence

drew closer, she could tell it was probably a woman, who had long black hair, and what looked like the burned tatters of a suit.

“Hello? Are you hurt?” asked Cadence. She wasn’t sure what this was. An irrational part of her thought she was dealing with aliens, but then sense took over. Maybe this was some sort of cargo that had dropped from an airplane? Cadence didn’t see any airplanes flying around, though. And what sort of cargo contained a woman?

“Must...get Illithica. Must save,” said the woman, to herself apparently. She noticed Cadence, and gave a weak smile. “Hello. I’m the Doctor. Had a bit of a crash.”

Casually, the Doctor turned around, and walked to the blue box. Opening the door, she suddenly cursed out loud.

“What’s wrong?” asked Cadence.

“It’s already starting to lose power. I was too late,” said the Doctor. She turned around, and nearly crashed into Cadence. “I’m sorry...you’ll have to do.”

“Do what?” asked Cadence. The woman was already sleeping though.

And then it was quiet. As if it hadn’t happened. As if a giant blue box hadn’t just wrecked its way into the sky. Cadence slung her arm over the Doctor’s shoulder, and dragged her into the house. She placed the Doctor on the floor, putting away the wine she had been drinking. She watched the Doctor for a moment, trying to figure out whether to call 911 or just wait and see.

A grating sound from outside broke her thought process, and she rushed back to the field again. A light was emanating from the box, shining onto her skin. Tingles crept up her spine, as she slowly opened the blue door, despite herself. The light turned on and off, showing an interior that was far too large for the box. Her hand reached inside...

And felt an electric sting that made her yelp. An image of a strange planet, with a reddish sky, flashed before her eyes. It felt familiar, somehow. She quickly slammed the door shut, and ran back inside. The Doctor was awake, staring at her.

“What is that box?” asked Cadence, feeling guilty somehow.

“It’s my home,” said the Doctor. In her hand was the picture of the ex-husband and son.

"That's a personal item," added Cadence sharply. She snatched the picture from the Doctor's hand.

"So is my TARDIS," said the Doctor. It took a moment for Cadence to realize she was talking about the blue box. "Is this your family?"

"Was," said Cadence.

"I'm sorry," said the Doctor.

"No, they're still alive. Just...not with me anymore," added Cadence.

The Doctor looked extremely confused. She scratched her hair, as if trying to understand a riddle. Then, "Oh. Divorce!"

Cadence decided to change the subject. "Are you, like, military?"

"On the bad days I am," said the Doctor. She tried to push herself off the chair, but was too tired to. Cadence moved to help her, but the Doctor waved her off. "Cadence. I need you to answer a question."

"You heard me say my name?" asked Cadence.

"I'm not deaf in my old age," said the Doctor. She sighed deeply, adding "So old..."

The woman didn't even look thirty, yet she was honestly concerned about her age. Cadence was starting to feel self-conscious, so she noted "You still look really young."

The Doctor gave an honest smile at that. "Thank you. I needed that."

Then she coughed up yellow dust. The particles glowed as they dispersed into the air.

"Regeneration energy. I need to choose a successor," said the Doctor. Adjusting herself on the seat, she added "I don't have time to dawdle. Answer my question: are you a good person?"

"Um, what?" asked Cadence.

"It's...oh, how do I explain this? Right now, I can't do something that needs to be done. There's a girl that needs saving, but I'm too weak to do it. I need someone to take my job. And you're the only person around for miles. I checked on my scanner," said the Doctor.

"Scanner?"

"I can't answer that right now. I need to know, are you a good person?"

"I-I-what's the job?"

"Saving a girl's life."

"A girl's in danger?" asked Cadence.

"Yes. She's been kidnapped, and I need to rescue her. But I was hit with radiation on the way out, and now I'm so tired. Too tired. I can sense my cells decaying. The TARDIS is losing energy because it's pumping my flesh with regenerative energy. It knows what needs to happen next."

"What needs to happen next?" asked Cadence, despite herself. "If someone's in danger, we should get the police."

"Police won't help. They're too wrapped up in the kidnapping. Plus, it's hard to call them from a planet away," said the Doctor quietly. She stared at Cadence, and added "But thank you for caring. That'll serve you well."

"Well with wha--"

The Doctor's eyes closed. Her breathing stopped.

And then light began to pour from her body, shining so bright that it hurt Cadence's eyes. What happened next was hard for Cadence to remember exactly. Her recollection was slippery afterward, like trying to remember what she did as a young toddler. Brief images of confusion were there, and somewhere along the line, Cadence remembered stumbling into the TARDIS, and closing the door. The ship began to hum, as if it had been waiting for Cadence. In retrospect, it had been.

The Doctor woke up from her nap with a jolt. The spaceship had finally arrived at the Eldritch Town. Buggies made of gold drove along the countryside, honking at the occasional passenger. Clockwork people wearing green dresses and black cloaks journeyed through the streets, talking amongst themselves. It reminded the Doctor of the Tim Burton films she used to watch with her son...

No. That's the past now. Best forget.

Ignoring the twinge of a memory, she walked out from the ship, ignoring the looks from the others. She was the rare flesh-and-blood tourist to this area. The memories of her past incarnation filtered through her mind, reminding her of the path she needed to take. If she wanted to catch Illithica, she would have to be quick.

But first, she needed to deal with the diplomat. His beady eyes were starting him up and down suspiciously. The Doctor smiled at him, trying to hide the nervousness in her gut. Calmly, she asked him "Where is the meeting place?"

"Not far. The Avvians are already here. We'd best be going, or they'll have our heads," said the Diplomat. Again, an uneasy smile crossed his mouth.

Something was wrong. It wasn't just her intuition telling her this—she could sense anger radiating from his mind, like needles over her skin. Adjusting her black jacket, she tried to extend her senses into his mind. Fleeting images came to her, but nothing concrete. It was almost like a haze had come over his mind (She could also sense Miaki in her pocket. She could have awakened him, but chose not to.) Deciding to worry about it later, she followed his way through the town.

The Town was filled with the Clockwork people, a group of techorganic lifeforms. The Doctor could see some of them working with each other in shops, selling wares like oil or tune-ups. Others were just loitering around town, their bodies clanking loudly on the sandy surface, leaving footprints like sharp ridges. Each gave off a psychic sense that felt different from the organic life-forms, but was distinctly alive.

"This place is considered a neutral zone for the war parties. The Clockworks do not favor one side over the other, and have agreed to let us figure things out. I appreciate their help, don't you?"

"Of course," said the Doctor. "It's awfully nice of them."

“Indeed. Makes me almost forget how weird they look,” said the Diplomat. His lips curled in disgust.

The Doctor nearly agreed with him, but she got the feeling she shouldn’t.

“So, what happened to your predecessor?” asked the Diplomat.

The Doctor wondered how much he knew. He was the last person her predecessor had been investigating before getting shot by a sneak attack from a phaser. It had been only luck that allowed her to get to the TARDIS.

Was she already thinking of her former life in 1st person?

“I got ill. Needed a replacement, so I’m here,” said the Doctor brusquely.

“Ah, what a pity. I had really liked her, from what I had heard.”

The Doctor doubted that, but didn’t reply.

They walked in silence, until they turned a corner. A large building, with tons of noise emanating from it, loomed before them. Swiping a keycard, the door opened to even more noise. The Doctor’s ears almost hurt from the sounds of hundreds of keyboards being typed on. This had to be some form of bureaucratic room. The Diplomat seemed to be ignoring the noise, and they swiftly came through the doors to the elevator. He pressed a few buttons, and then the Doctor found herself in a completely different room.

The Diplomat was nowhere to be seen.

Dammit.

The Doctor surveyed the room. It was a simple place. A woolen carpet covered the room, with a fire held in glass lighting the area. Her eyes noted that the place looked surprisingly like 2010-era rooms, which surprised her, because this was far too long into the future for that. Touching the fabric, she could tell it was authentic fabric from Earth.

Terrans were rare in the Clockwork Town. Why would someone have Earth fashion?

“Miaki,” she whispered to the bat in her pocket. He pushed out his furry head, and made a horrified noise.

“Where are we?” he asked. “And why didn’t you wake me earlier?”

“Let’s focus on the now,” said the Doctor.

Miaki said something under his breath, and flew out of her pocket. He sniffed around the area, and flew over to the chair. “I hear something outside the door. Breathing.”

“We’re being watched?” asked the Doctor.

And then a man walked in. Or, at least the Doctor assumed that it was a man. His skin was greenish, like a native Venusian, but his body proportions was closer to a humanoid form. He had a bald head, and wore what looked like a red silk dress of some sort. He bowed to the Doctor.

“Hello. I am Amma, the representative of Venusian politics. Are you comfortable?”

“Why was I brought here?” asked the Doctor.

“A new member of the delegation requires to be checked. We can’t have just any person coming into these talks,” said Amma. His face suddenly soured, as he noticed Miaki crawling on the floor. “Or just any animal.”

Miaki hissed at that statement.

“Just anyone? I’m the Doctor. I’m the main mediator for this meeting. I’m already cleared!” she said.

“You’re different from what we were expecting. We had to be sure,” he said, smiling. “Come on, the deal’s already underway.”

The Doctor entered a room filled with various people arguing. It reminded her of a debate team, with people screaming at each other or pointing fingers. On one side were the Venusians. Each one of them had five arms and five legs, and twelve-eye stalks. Their green skin was leathery, and reminded the Doctor of a lizard she had seen in the zoo once. Their clothing was adorned with a feathery design, and each one of them spoke with a calm, measured appearance.

The Avvians, on the other hand, were a motley crew. The Avvians were a collection of different races, composed of not only of whatever race Heripo was from, but Terran descendants, Judoons, and even a few reformed Cyber-citizens. They considered their heterogeneity a strength, and were willing to defend their home. Their chosen representative seemed to be Heripo, who only had given the Doctor a moment's glance before continuing his tirade.

All around the table, Clockwork servants were standing by.

"For the last time, what do you expect us to do? Simply let your troops rush into and take us over," said Heripo.

"It is not a takeover. We...simply require a piece of assurance that we will not lose everything in this new age of freedom for your planet," said a Venusian. Based on the ornamentation on the headdress, she guessed that this was the leader. He pushed a hand in Heripo's direction, and added "It would be with minimum fuss."

Amma repeated what the Venusian said. It took a moment for her to realize he was translating for the Venusians.

"Look behind Heripo" Miaki whispered into her mind. The Doctor didn't even know where Miaki was physically. She strained her eyes past Heripo's body, and saw a man wearing a crown who she didn't recognize seeing before, but felt familiar. Her predecessor had met this man briefly.

But it was the girl by the man's side that interested the Doctor. It was Illithica, the child the Doctor had arrived to rescue. The girl had dark skin, and bright purple eyes. But her gaze looked blank now, almost like she was in a daze. The Doctor wondered how long Illithica had been away from home. Would it be a good idea to just run over there and take Illithica right now?

She noticed Heripo looking at her. No, it wouldn't be good. The girl was so close, yet too far.

"Is something amiss," asked Heripo. "You seem preoccupied, Doctor."

The Doctor didn't know how to respond, having been caught off-guard. She laughed uneasily, and said "Sorry, a lot on my mind."

"I'm sorry that this meeting between our civilizations is so boring to you," said Heripo.

Annoyed by his tone, the Doctor shot back "It isn't boring, just a bit banal. This isn't even the first time I've negotiated a meeting between your civilizations. And let me tell you, your descendants weren't as rude."

(She didn't actually know if that was true or not.)

"Descendants?" asked a Venusian on the side. He focused his eyes onto the Doctor, and asked her directly, "You've seen our descendants?"

"I've seen lots of things," said the Doctor. She stretched now, feeling more comfortable. "But I'm not here to talk about myself. I mean, I like to talk about myself, but we wouldn't want to be here all day. No, you and the Avvians want to be done by lunch-time, so let's go over this quickly. So, Venusians, what do you want?"

"Well," said Amma, "I suppose we simply want assurances that we won't starve to death from losing our resources. The Venusians have enjoyed the use of our planets, and although it makes sense that Avvians want--"

"Enjoyed? You stole them from us! Why, you--"

"Let him finish talking, Heripo," said the Doctor. The diplomat shut up, but was clearly still seething.

Miaki had just flown into the room. She could sense his flying above, overlooking the location, out of sight. Something was distressing him, but she couldn't spare a glance up.

"As we were saying, the Venusians simply want to make sure that our people continue to be comfortable," said Amma.

"Your comfort level was built on the back of resources that you didn't earn. You took it from others," said the Doctor. "Not to point fingers, but you are going to have to expect to become a little less comfortable in the years to come."

Amma snapped back "We are not the Daleks, Doctor. We are not some invading race that destroys. My Venusian grandmother had to fight to get where she started, from a

low member of society, to a servant in the high court of Venusian society. I dislike your implication that we are some haughty uncaring privileged race.”

“I’m not here to imply anything. I mean, I, uh, respect Venusian society--”

“Yet you do not show it.”

“Silence,” said a Venusian behind Amma. His voice was strong, and familiar somehow. Far within the Doctor’s memories, she could sense him, having met him several bodies before, years into the future. She...He had been with Polly that day, and had talked with the Venusian about a deal with the Avvian. Except that...

“Doctor, we will leave the Avvian system, but we still desire some resources, at least for now. Perhaps trade can be established?” he said hopefully.

“Perhaps it can be,” said the Doctor. She turned her head to look at Heripo. “Well?”

Heripo harrumphed. Turning around, he began to confer with the crowned man in another language. The man’s face was covered with a mask, and the Doctor couldn’t sense anything coming from his mind. Odd. But she could sense Heripo’s mind, and sensed a calmness in his head. She suspected that perhaps the diplomat’s blustery attitude was partially an act.

Wait. That calmness wasn’t Heripo’s. It was someone else’s...

The Crowned Man suddenly stopped Heripo with a raise of his hand, and stared straight at the Doctor. His yellow mask showed no expression, but she felt like she’d been caught somehow. Raising a bony hand, he tapped the cage that Illithica was in.

Heripo then said “We will be happy to accept the terms of trade. With of course, checkpoints allowed so that we can make sure we’re not getting taken advantage of.”

Amma was about to respond, when Miaki slammed into the Crowned Man’s direction suddenly, making everyone start. The Doctor barely had time to react before Heripo had slapped the creature away. He skidded across the table, and looked dazed.

“Where did this rodent come from?” called out Amma.

“He’s mine!” grumbled the Doctor.

As the Doctor was about to grab Miaki and stuff him into her pocket, she noticed something glowing from the side of her gaze. A golden hue was coming from Illithica's cage, nearly blinding the Doctor.

Miaki started to shout "Doctor, don't--"

A wall of static smashed into the Doctor's mind. Her senses were scrambled, as she fell from her chair. Screams filled her ears, and her vision became blurry. For a split second, her entire body was on pins and needles--

"What do you mean, you fell in love with her again?" asked Cadence. Her heart was beating so fast, rushing away all her sense.

He sat there, dumbly. "I didn't mean it. I was in the parking lot of Joe's Coffee, and I just saw her again. We just started talking and reminiscing about old times, and it was fun, and--"

"And you somehow leaped into wanting to get back with her?"

"Don't shout at me. It's not good for my son," he said.

"I thought he was ours," she asked.

Doctor.

He rolled his eyes. He had the damn nerve to roll his eyes.

"Listen, I enjoyed my time with you. But with her, it feels different. I didn't realize how much I loved her still. I'm sorry--"

"Did you have an affair with her? Behind my back?" she spat out.

"No," he said, not looking at her.

There was so many things she wanted to say, so many things she wanted to scream out. But she could hear the whine of the TV that Billy was watching in the next room. She didn't want him to hear that.

Doctor, wake up.

Then, her husband added “And I’ll be taking Billy.”

“What?!” she said, jolted.

“That’s the woman who birthed him. It’s what best for the child,” he said.

“But I’m the woman who raised him,” Cadence said.

Cadence, you have to wake up now. Illithica needs you!

The Doctor awakened. At first she was dazed as she pushed herself off the floor, then noticed three Clockwork soldiers surrounding her, with what the Doctor recalled from her previous incarnations as energy weapons. A blast from any one of them meant instant immolation. She raised her hands up in reflex.

“Don’t move or speak,” snarled one of the Clockworks. All of their bodies looked rusty, like they hadn’t gotten in for a maintenance check for a while.

“Why--” she asked. In response, a blast of red plasma flew past her head, singeing her hair. Her ear stung from the heat, and she winced, though did her best not to show it.

“We know your ways. You’re a trickster, and we’ve been told not to let you talk or move,” said another of the soldiers.

The Doctor nodded. She quickly looked around the room, and saw that she was still in the conference room. Chairs were flung across the room, and her eyes noticed scuff marks on the carpet, indicating there had been a struggle. Extending her psychic senses, anger and confusion was all she could sense.

What had happened?

Suddenly, she heard a familiar flapping sound from above. In a flash, Miaki crashed into one of the Clockwork robots, who blasted off a plasma bolt in the direction of the second one. The Doctor used the confusion to make a run for the doors.

“Stay where you are!” she heard behind her. She automatically dodged to the left, and just missed the energy blast by a few second, which instead crashed through the doors,

ripping them into a melted husk. Bustling through the new opening, she felt Miaki land on her shoulder.

"This is why I said you need to build yourself a sonic screwdriver. For situations like this," hissed Miaki.

"I didn't have time," said the Doctor. "Are you okay?"

He matted down the tangled fur of his head with a paw, and made an annoyed chirp. Sniffing, he said "I'll live."

"What happened while I was out? Why'd I go unconscious?"

"Illithica's powers were used to create a signal to scramble your psychic abilities. And then the Clockworks came out of nowhere and started attacking people. Apparently today was the day they decided to stage a rebellion for freedom."

"How coincidental," said the Doctor. "And I didn't know my abilities could be jammed."

"You're not infallible. Any Doctor needs to remember that.," said Miaki.

After a few moments of running down random hallways, she took a moment to catch her bearings. She had no idea where she was, or where she needed to go. Extending her senses gave her no trace of Illithica, but she could sense the Venusian leader. Following the trace, she found him crouching down, under the table.

"Doctor?" he asked.

"Hello," she said. She realized she didn't know his name. "Are you alright?"

"Yes," he said. He made an odd noise. "I thought this could be a time for peace."

"Don't count that out just yet," said the Doctor. "Where's the Prince?"

"The Clockworks took him," said the Venusian, pointing down the left hallway. "I think they plan to kill him."

"I won't let that happen," said the Doctor resoundingly. She had no idea if she could keep that promise, but it seemed to calm him down. "And the leader of the Avvians? The one with the girl?"

"I am not sure."

The Doctor frowned. Any time spent looking for the prince was time not being spent on the reason she came here, which was to save the girl. A random trade deal on a planet wasn't the highest of priorities, nor was stopping a rebellion for freedom. At the same time, she felt it wrong to just abandon these people. And the Venusian seemed so mournful.

"Stay here," she said. She would find the prince, and keep her eyes open for the girl. As an afterthought, she said "And what's your name?"

The Venusian looked shocked. "Bill-in."

Bill. The name stung at her mind, threatening to call up recollections she didn't need right now. She nodded, and said "I'll find the prince."

It didn't take long. The Doctor soon heard the sounds of Prince Amma speaking with someone.

"I thought you told me that you had handled the Doctor?" said the Prince. He didn't look like he was being threatened—instead, he was angrily talking to the Crowned Man. "The Doctor decided to hide behind a wall, and listened. She peeked the barest of looks.

The masked person loomed over the prince, craning his neck downward to see the man. The Crowned Man wore yellow armor that glinted in the fluorescent light of the building, and the few hints of exposed skin seemed to be wriggling, like there was something underneath his skin. He rested a large bony hand on the prince's shoulder. Amma wilted under the touch.

"Poor Amma. Left all alone in the world, born to rule a kingdom you don't understand. Forced to grovel underneath me," said the Crowned Man. "It must be so difficult to need me."

Amma said quietly "No, it is not difficult to need you. I simply require more guidance. You told me that the Doctor will be killed."

“And she was. The Doctor, however, is a resourceful individual. But it doesn’t matter. You’ll have everything you need soon,” said the tall man.

A small hand tapped the Doctor on the shoulder. The Doctor jumped, turning around to see Illithica looking at her. The girl gestured her to follow. voice say The Doctor wanted to stay and listen to the prince’s reply, but Illithica quickly moved away, and the Doctor nearly stumbled trying to catch up. The beads in the girl’s braided hair shone, giving the Doctor a sign of where the girl was going.

“Who are you?” asked the girl as they were walking.

“I’m the Doctor. I’m here to rescue you.”

The girl gave her a confused look. “Where’s the other Doctor? The one who said she’d wait for me?”

It was surreal, looking at Illithica. Cadence remembered being the previous Doctor, the one with long brown hair. She remembered seeing Illithica cry, as the girl begged that Doctor not to go, not to leave her. She remembered the feeling of dread as she tried to explain to the girl about regeneration, but didn’t have the time or the energy.

“I’ll be back. I’ll be different, but I won’t leave you,” the Doctor had said. She could remember that Illithica didn’t seem to believe her. That Doctor’s hearts had plummeted, as she walked away from Illithica, leaving the girl alone, so that she could regenerate fast enough to return.

And now, here she was. The Doctor who had left Illithica alone had died, but she was still in this Doctor’s mind. The Doctor currently here could remember those thoughts and memories—no, felt those thoughts and memories as her own.

“I’m right here,” said the Doctor.

“No you’re not--”

“I told you I’d look different. You should have more faith,” she added. She ruffled Illithica’s hair. “And I’m going to get you out of here. But first, I need to find the Venusian leader. Bill-in.”

“Why?” asked a voice behind her. “Are you working with him?”

It was Heripo. His clothes was tattered, with burn marks over his body. He had one of the Clockwork’s robots’ guns, and his eyes looked crazed. “Did you set this up?”

The Doctor strolled over to him. “No, I didn’t. I came here for the child, and only the child. But if you want my help, you need to put the gun down.”

“How dare you talk to me that way! This entire day, you’ve been looking down at me,” asked Heripo. “And now my career is in ruins. The best trade deal of my life has been ripped to pieces because--”

“Shut up,” the Doctor said calmly.

“I have a gun--”

“And I’ve been shot before. By a high-pulse laser rifle. And I came back, good as new. Looking rather fetching,” said the Doctor, doing a dramatic twirl (while winking at Illithica), “if I may say so myself. So, are you going to waste your ammunition? Or do you want to become the savior of both the Avvians and the Venusians?”

Heripo blinked twice. Then he lowered his gun.

“Good boy,” she said. He nearly raised his gun again, and the Doctor made a mental note not to be too smug.

“So, what’s going on?” asked Heripo.

“Prince Amma’s been working with the Crowned Man. Who exactly is the Crowned Man?” asked the Doctor.

“I...don’t remember. He said he wanted to watch over the proceedings,” said Heripo.

“Weren’t you interested why he was there?” said the Doctor.

“Well, of course I was. I...” started Heripo. His eyes cast a far off glance. There was a mental filler in his mind. Something had blocked off his perception.

“Illithica.”

The Doctor turned around to see the Crowned Man standing before them, reaching for the girl. His hands lunged after the girl, extending like long talons. She snatched her out of the way right Behind him, several Clockwork men were pointing laser rifles at her. By now, she'd almost gotten used to having weapons pointed in her direction.

"Who are you?" asked the Crowned Man.

"I'm the Doctor."

"No, I doubt that. The Doctor was an ancient creature of immeasurable power. He and I fought horrifically, until I was drowned beneath the sea, forced to decay against my will. You, on the other hand, seem of much weaker stock."

Her heart was pounding in her chest. Behind his mask holes, he seemed to peer into her mind, and she recalled all the fear and stress she had been pushing away.

"But, I-I'm the Doctor. I was just here before."

"Before when? Or are you referring to the Earth woman who I stabbed in the back? The one who was meddling? She was a pretender, too. I wonder, is she alive?"

The Doctor hesitated, before responding. That second of hesitation cost her, as she noticed too late the blast of energy coming her way. She twisted her body in an attempt to dodge, but it was too late. The force of the blast hurled her to the floor, and something might have broken.

Miaki leaped from her pocket, and took the force of the blast. His body was flung to the floor, and his wings looked badly burnt. Blood spilt onto the floor where he had fallen.

"Illithica, run!" screamed out the Doctor. Her body whined with pain at the exertion.

"You fools, don't let her go!" said the Prince. The soldiers followed the escaping girl, while Heripo stayed frozen.

"What's going on?" asked Heripo faintly, like he was trying to see through a daze.

"Nothing," said the Crowned Man. He slithered over to the Doctor, and lowered his face to hers.

“Why are you doing this?” asked the Doctor.

“I need more influence. There are less Time Lords now—history is becoming unpredictable. That girl contains great psychic power—she just doesn’t know how to harness it. Don’t you understand?” he asked. He cocked his head, and sighed. “I see that you do not. Pity. Your namesake would’ve. He disagreed, but he understood.”

“I remember disagreeing with you,” said the Doctor, reaching through her predecessors’ memories. “And I do understand. You want her to harness her power to your ends, right? I don’t need to be too smart to understand that,” said the Doctor.

“Not harness, direct. I will teach her how to use her gifts, how to be responsible with them. Would you rather she be without any guidance?”

“If you’re so nice, “ said the Doctor slowly, “then why is it that you kept her in a cage?”

The Crowned Man was silent. She could hear her own breathing, and hear an odd wet sound coming from under his mask, a sound like meat sliding against meat, with a slick squelching purr.

“Tell me, what is your real name, human?” asked the Crowned Man.

“The Doctor.”

“I see. Should you keep the name, it will change you, you know. It’s not just a title,” he said. “Already, you should be able to hear a second heartbeat, where there once was only one.”

She could. It was a constant reminder of how different she was now.

One of the soldiers was rammed through the walls. The Doctor was shocked to see Illithica slowly crawling through the hole in the wall, static creeping out from her eyes. Rainbow colors spilled out of her hair, like energy was visually seeping from her brain.

“Let the Doctor go,” said Illithica.

The Crowned Man raised a finger in response. “And what will you give in return?”

“Nothing.” said the Doctor. She pushed herself off the floor, wincing at the pain. She noticed Heripo was still standing there, his eyes lost in a daze. She sensed that his mind was clouded by whatever the Crowned Man had done. If she could just get close enough to touch...

“Illithica. You’ll never be welcome anywhere. Your power’s too great. Already, I can see your body feeling the stress of your power.”

He was right. Sweat covered the girl’s body, and her hands twitched and spasmed.

The Doctor walked toward Illithica’s direction, but fell on the ground before she could reach the girl.

“This Doctor is in no state to help you,” said the Crowned Man.

The Doctor made a big show of flopping on the ground. At this level, she could see the limp body of Miaki. She hoped he was okay. Heripo was so close now, and she extended her fingers to his rubbery skin, and made the barest of contacts—

The Crowned Man grabbed her, and flung her into the wall. This time, something definitely broke.

“Make your choice, Illithica!” snarled the Crowned Man.

Half-conscious on the far side, the Doctor couldn’t even see what was happening. But it didn’t matter.

The sound of laser fire, and the Crowned Man’s shout of surprise made her smile.

“I think I’ve made mine,” said Heripo.

The Doctor had only needed a second to contact Heripo’s mind, and dispel the control. She rolled over, to see the Crowned Man slipping away. Illithica powered down, and went to the Doctor’s side.

“Are you alright?” asked Illithica.

“No,” said the Doctor. “Check on Miaki.”

"I'm fine," he said. He walked over to the Doctor slowly, one of his wings having been nearly burnt off. Nuzzling her with his nose, he added "I've been in worse scraps. Are you okay?"

"I think so," she said, then she fell unconscious.

A short man with a Panama hat. A blonde man with a colorful patchwork coat. A tall gangly man with a bow tie. A woman wearing a striped shirt and a light blue coat.

She has been all of these. And she remembers all of their deaths.

And she remembers her latest death the best.

She remembers running to the TARDIS, having left Illithica behind. She remembers feeling the wound by her side, sensing the cellular decay. Remembers the heat of regeneration energy coursing through, saving her biodata, preparing it for the next inheritor. Each Doctor, after the Final Battle of Garsennon, has needed to find her own successor.

She remembers that her real name, in that body, was Mila. She remembers how Mila began to despair, as she set around the TARDIS's controls, racking her brain for a possible successor. So little time, so much pressure.

Mila remembers speaking to a woman at a soup kitchen. A divorced woman, who decided to spend her time trying to help the downtrodden as a way to distract herself from her sadness. What was the woman's name? Cad...something.

Mila remembers how, behind the woman's nervous demeanor, there was a certain strength. The 2 woman disagreed on much. Mila was a weathered soul, rather cynical of people and their motives, whereas Cadence was more of an idealist, a dreamer who believed the best in people. Mila, though she liked children, had never wanted one of her own in her human life; Cadence counted her years with her son as some of her favorite times. But they had certain similarities, a commonality of spirit. They both loved adventure, both wanted to right wrongs. They were kindred souls, in a way.

And Illithica will need a kindred spirit. Something more important, more powerful than a trade meeting, is going on here. Mila needs to make sure her successor can handle what's coming.

Cadence will have to do.

The Doctor woke up. She found herself lying on a hospital bed. Illithica was beside the bed, eyeing her.

“What happened?” asked the Doctor.

“The Crowned Man disappeared off somewhere after you fell unconscious. He had everyone under his spell before you stopped him.”

“Do you know who he is?” asked the Doctor.

“I never knew much. I just know that he wanted to use me,” said Illithica. “The doctors are shocked that you healed so quickly.”

“That’s a perk of being a Doctor,” said Miaki. He was in Illithica’s arms. Most of his body looked okay, though one of his wings was bandaged up. The Doctor extended a hand and petted her companion, who made a purring sound, and said “They were worried for a minute. Even I was worried.”

“I’m just happy to be okay,” said the Doctor.

Bill-in opened through the door. The Doctor could see Heripo behind him, standing awkwardly.

“May we come in?” asked Bill-in.

The Doctor gave a look to Miaki.

“It’s safe,” Miaki thought back.

“Come in,” said the Doctor.

Bill-in nodded. He strolled in, and bowed to the Doctor. He glanced at Heripo, as if he expected the diplomat to bow as well. Heripo ignored him.

“Thank you, Doctor,” said Bill-in. “You saved us both from being destroyed from within.”

“Yes. Apparently, this crowned person subverted us, and teamed up with the prince to take over both systems. If it hadn’t been for you, we might have failed completely,” said Heripo.

“You’re welcome,” said the Doctor. It felt inadequate, but she didn’t know what else to say.

“However, there’s still a rebellion of Clockworks to deal with,” added Heripo.

The Doctor sighed. She wondered whether she had the energy to handle this.

“I don’t think that’s our problem,” said Miaki.

Heripo jumped. “The rat can talk?”

“I am not a rat. I may not be able to fly currently, but I am not a rat.”

“Miaki, shush,” said the Doctor. She crossed her arms. “But I agree. A rebellion isn’t my problem. Actually, maybe I’ll help them out.”

Heripo went as pale as a green-skinned man could.

“Then don’t be naughty. Fix your own backyard, and let me rest.”

Heripo sighed, and, after a pause, bowed. Then he quickly ran off.

Bill-in stared at her. His gaze carried a deep significance, that she couldn’t understand.

“You told right” he said.

“Right about what?” asked the Doctor.

“Don’t you remember? At my ceremony, when my name was chosen by you. All those years ago, you were there. Your skin was not a day older, and you told me I would be the leader on a day of great import for the Avvians and Venusians. I could not understand then, but I see now.”

“You...do?”

“You are confused?” asked Bill-in. Then he smiled wider, and said “It hasn’t happened for you yet, Kr’aklathique.”

“Kra...what?”

“Walker through the Mists of Time. We will meet again, Doctor. Or at least you will meet me.”

As Bill-in walked out, the Doctor felt like too much was pressing down on her. The realization that she was fated to continue being the Doctor. The realization that she might have never had a choice at all.

Was her life always meant to be this way? Was she always fated to lose her marriage? Was she fated to lose her Billy?

Some part of her mind knew the technical answer (*wanderers in the 4th dimension; big ball of timey-wimey; fixed points in rime my dear Chesterton, I mean points in time*) but it felt unsatisfying to her, all the same.

And as she thought about her Billy, her beautiful boy, something the Venusian leader had said niggled at her mind. A connection that she was too tired, or too emotional, to consciously make. Her vision was blurry, and she closed her eyes. Tears fell from her eyes, as she remembered who she had left behind, and wondered if she’d see them again.

Her mind slowly drifted back in unconsciousness, where she dreamed about the past

The Doctor stood outside the TARDIS. The Avvians had been rather grateful for the Doctor saving them from the Crowned Man, and so it had been no hardship to get the TARDIS towed over. Even Heripo had been happy to oblige.

The Doctor herself was in a blue afghan coat, over a yellow linen shirt. A light yellow brim hat completed her look. She had decided that she wasn’t sure if the magician’s look suited her. Miaki assured her that changing costumes wasn’t unusual for a new Doctor, although he balked when she demanded he get matching clothes. (“I am not a pet, Doctor.”) It provided warmth against the cold winter air, and it also matched her hair. Turned out that the chemicals used in Clockwork hospitals turned Terrans hair blue.

Miaki assured her that, after going through a few different shades of color, it would return to normal. After calming down, the Doctor began to admit she liked it.

Billy would have found it hilarious. God, it hurt her to think about how much he would have loved to go on space adventures. She was relieved when Illithica shook her from the memories.

“Doctor, I—are you crying?”

“No. Are you okay?”

“I’m fine. But I’ve got nowhere to go,” said Illithica. “I’ve spent a lot of time going from place to place, and then being taken from place to place. I’m not sure what to do now.”

The Doctor pivoted towards the girl. “Come with me.”

“Really?” the girl asked. But the Doctor didn’t need to be psychic to sense the girl’s excitement.

“If you’re interested,” said the Doctor. She gave a smug half-smile. “It travels in time and space.”

“Thanks. I’m, uh, good with cooking and cleaning. I can--”

“I don’t need an servant. That’s what Miaki’s for,” said the Doctor.

He crawled out of her pocket with a ready remark, and she stuck out her tongue.

“What I do need, is someone to be a companion. I need company,” said the Doctor.

“Ahem, I count as a companion, I think!” said Miaki.

“Yes, but you’re injured,” pointed out the Doctor.

“I can do that,” said Illithica.

The Doctor smiled. Maybe, with her guidance, Illithica could learn to harness her gifts, without the interference of people who would use her. It was a long-shot, but the Doctor had to try.

“Did you have company before?” asked Illithica.

“Many times.”

“Was Cadence one of them?”

The Doctor, who was opening the TARDIS, turned around sharply.

“You mentioned her in the hospital. While you were half-asleep.”

The Doctor paused. “She’s someone dear to me. Someone I remember, when I really need to, but only when I try. It keeps me human.”

“Aren’t you human?” asked Illithica.

The Doctor smiled wider, and opened the TARDIS doors.

Illithica took a look inside, and yelped a shocked noise. Then she looked at the Doctor.

“I know,” said the Doctor, raising an eyebrow. “It’s bigger on the inside.”

“Aren’t we all?” asked Miaki, winking at the Doctor.

Drawn Upon A Supernova

by Gallifrey Immigrant

What if 'Perfect Authentic Cadence', with the Charlotte Gainsbourg Doctor, had a prequel?

She had been an artist. A creative type, the kind to drone on and on about her worries, and draw it into colorful drawings.

Her name had been...Mila. It takes effort for her to remember now.

One day (the date was April 54th, 2408), she had been drawing a portrait, when the klaxons sounded. That was the war sounds, the way it always sounded when the Artian army attacked her planet.

Except it wasn't the Artians this time. A group of misshapen men, wearing spherical helmets, each with the same face, announced that her town was holding a Rutan fugitive. Mila never found out if they were right, though she suspected not.

Flames. She still remembered running from the scorching wood of her burnt-down home, while the Sontarans torched her place. She probably would have died, if she hadn't met the Doctor.

The Doctor had been a dark-skinned woman. Eyes of gold, from a mutation of her species that never left, even after the "Doctorization". A quick-witted woman, really good with gadgets. The Doctor had found Mila among the ruins, and given her a home. Despite the horror, the Doctor had seemed cool, and like she had all the answers. Mila, of course, now knew that had been a pretense. Being the Doctor meant constantly worrying, and never showing it.

Mila had watched how the Doctor gathered the rebels. She singlehandedly organized an entire force to defeat the Sontarans. Her humor kept the morale up, and her stories about her adventures fascinated everybody.

Then she was blasted fatally. It had been a ploy to trick the Sontarans, that worked, but backfired on her. Radiation lapped over the Doctor. Mila tried to help the Doctor, to block the shot, but it didn't work. Just left them both dying slowly. The two were left alone in the darkness, watching a desolate landscape.

Then, the Doctor whispered a secret. That she wasn't the first Doctor. That a long line of humans and non-humans had each taken the role, and that each of these Doctors had needed to trade their life for that of a service to the role of a Doctor. The power to travel time and space, to be stronger than normal, to be faster than normal, slightly enhanced senses...the full deluxe package, she said. But, there was a price. A job, to do good.

"Not sure whether it's fate or coincidence, but any Doctor always find themselves in the middle of trouble. Needin' to do good, even when they don't want to," said the Doctor. Her eyes started getting unfazed, as if she was staring far away.

"I couldn't imagine living like that. All that responsibility," said Mila.

The Doctor stared at Mila. A smile crept over her face.

"It can be fun," said the Doctor. She sighed, and golden dust left her mouth. "But sacrifices gotta be made."

Then an outpouring of light ripped through the Doctor's body, and the light flowed into Mila's mouth, and swirled into her soul.

Dextus wandered through the ruins of the city. A sudden radiation surge, meant to purge the Sontarans, had spread through the town. He was a scavenger, trying to find what he could before the town folk tried to get back in. The abandoned buildings looked cold and empty, without any persons around to live in them.

He turned the corner, and saw a brunette woman with long hair sitting on a sidewalk. Her face was young, with but showed so much sadness that even Dex was affected. Her arms were wrapped around a shovel, which she leaned on. Her clothes were dirty with ashes, and what looked like a make-shift grave was in front of her.

He slowly walked past her. Her grey eyes flickered in his direction, but she didn't say hello. That unnerved him more than it should have. She wasn't like a statue, staring out into space.

"This place is supposed to be empty," said Dextrus.

"Have the Sontarans left?" asked the woman.

Dextrus laughed. "They all ran. Said that radiation messed up their bodies."

The woman nodded. She slung the shovel over her shoulder, and started walking.

He watched her leave. The make-shift grave was still there, a piece of wood with engravings stuck onto the surface. For some reason, he felt tempted to read it. Walking over the rubble, he read the words "For Sarah- also known as the Doctor. Protector of the helpless. Died saving Mila."

The Doctor? That had been the name of the odd young woman who started fighting off the Sontarans. There had been rumors that she was responsible for saving them from the Sontarans, but others said that she had left them all to die. Either way, the girl had disappeared.

Dextrus had assumed she had escaped from the chaos, or was even a myth. But, seeing this grave, he wondered. Turning around, he nearly jumped out of his skin, as the woman with the shovel was standing right behind him. There was no way she could have crossed the distance that fast.

"She gave her life to me. To make me well enough to survive," said the woman.

"Was she the Doctor? The supposed freedom fighter?" he asked.

"Yes. She was the Doctor. Now, I think I am," said the woman. She suddenly turned her head, as if she had heard something. Dextrus could hear only silence. Extending her hand, she moved it slowly, till it pointed in a direction.

"What--"

"Shhh..." said the woman. "Can't you hear the bells? They sound blue."

“How can a music sound blue?”

“So you can’t hear it. Interesting,” said the woman.

“Are you Mila?” asked Dextrus, gesturing at the engraving.

“No. I’m the Doctor now. Make sure people remember what the last Doctor did. Remember what she stood for.”

And then the woman walked off again. Dextrus wouldn’t see her again.

When the Doctor took her TARDIS on its first ride, she just flew into space. No temporal jumps, or even trips to another planet. The Doctor had been too tired to do that, after having walked through the forest, following the sweet music. It had led her to a blue police box, whose exterior had been shifting even as she approached it. The interior had been changing as well. The room (much bigger on the inside) had been transforming into shelves, populated with books. The Doctor wasn’t sure how that was physically possible, but she had enjoyed the chance to read, and rest.

But at some point, she had to do something with the TARDIS. She wasn’t sure what to do. It wasn’t like she had ever planned on gaining the device. Most of her life had been spent on painting worlds, not exploring them. And yet, the last Doctor had decided to hand her the keys to this kingdom. The memories of the previous Doctor could guide her, but only so much. And they were all a jumble anyway. After a small time to ponder, she had just decided to jump into space.

Up close like this, it was a wonder. Stars gave off a light that was so bright, it nearly blinded her. Somehow, she could feel the chemical reaction within, and sense how they changed moment-by-moment. Probably a perk of being a Doctor.

What did it mean, being a Doctor?

The woman formerly known as Mila didn’t know. She knew that being a “Doctor” changed her somehow, in some deep way. Her human name no longer felt sufficient, like a cocoon she was shaking off. But who was she now?

As she stared out at the faint glare of a faraway exploding supernova, she pondered.

Walking through the halls of her TARDIS for painting equipment, she noticed a picture on the floor. Picking it up, she saw it was a picture of the last Doctor, along with 2 other people, and each one had the same golden eyes. These people felt familiar, somehow. Closing her eyes and reaching through the memory of her predecessor, she saw the faces.

These were the Doctor's parents, back when she was human.

Did these people know what had happened to their daughter?

Martin ran out of his house, carrying a titanium bat. Weird noises had awakened him in the middle of the night, and he wondered if it was another set of burglars. Bursting out of the back door, he found a white woman trying to slip a note into the mailbox. She wore a red suit, that looked pretty expensive. Her hair was long and black, with a prominent nose. She didn't look like a burglar, but she didn't look like a mail woman either.

"Who the hell are you?" asked Martin.

"I'm...the Doctor. I wanted to drop this message off to you," said the woman. Her accent sounded odd, almost French. "It's about Sarah."

Martin lowered his bat. "My daughter?"

"Yes," said the Doctor. Her eyes looked away. "I came to tell you that she's..."

"What? Has she gotten herself in trouble again? Need us to bail her out, is it?" asked Martin.

"No," said the Doctor.

Martin frowned. Then a dark thought crossed his mind. "Did she...is she...?"

"No, she's alive."

“Because I know she was hanging with those gangs. I told her to stay away from them, but--”

“She’s fine. She sent me here to tell you that she became a doctor. She’s had a successful life. One you’d be proud of,” said the Doctor.

“Really?” asked Martin. “She ain’t come back to tell usd herself?”

“She can’t. She’s too busy now. Maybe one day,” said the Doctor. “But she wanted you to know not to worry.”

Martin stared at the woman. This mysterious Doctor didn’t seem to be lying. But Sarah had never called back, not in six years. Why now?

“Good-bye, Martin,” said the Doctor. A tear fell from her eye. She wiped it away, frowning. “Sorry. Feeling emotions that aren’t my own.”

Before Martin could question that, the Doctor walked away.

Inside the mailbox was a note, and a picture of Sarah, from years ago.

The Doctor walked back to her TARDIS. This era, 2108, was only a few centuries away from her, but still seemed so different. Short houses compared to the durable materials of the tall buildings she was used to, and a reliance on the touch technology that had been phased out in her community. It was odd, seeming so alien.

It was a diverse (though majority African-immigrant) community, filled with a diverse set of human characters, but the Doctor still stuck out. People occasionally stared, especially one particular blue-haired lady with a flying mouse. The woman had waved at her, and the Doctor had quickly waved back, but ignored the attempt at conversation. She wasn’t in the mood for strangers, especially as meeting her predecessor’s parents had tired her.

As she wandered back into the TARDIS, she wondered what she’d do. Perhaps she’d give Picasso a meeting? She’d heard of him as one of the greats—it would be nice too see him in the flesh for the first time, in this body at least.

But, for the first few days, she decided to paint. Returning to a supernova, she drew the beautiful sight of the star exploding to the greatest detail, and watched the resulting galaxy birth anew.

Tomorrow, she would decide what to do next. But for now, she would draw.

Friends, Lovers or Nothing

by Nacho

What if the Mary Elizabeth Winstead Doctor had another story after 'Perfect Authentic Cadence', but from a different author's hand?

It was a slow day, and the sun was baking the moisture from the rooftops from a morning rain. There was rustling, a white noise like unyielding maracas around as a low wind reminded an almost silent world it was still alive.

The quiet atmosphere was solemn, holy even if you believed that sort of thing. Inside houses, children were watching their favorite programs at high volumes. Television speakers blaring but unable to carry, unwilling to disturb the greater peace perhaps.

In the streets people walked and cars drove. As they passed, people took their sounds with them. Very few conversations were happening and for some reason the sounds of life throughout the city refused to carry. To the quiet, a low wind blew across their face to remind them they were still alive.

It blew through alleys, over houses and through people. It did not chill, but it certainly pushed. It had a mind of its own and a destination in mind.

It wove its way through a great stone arch and over an out of place blue police box; it bobbed around graves, blowing dust and debris from their memorials in an offering to their memories.

It climbed up to a single, solitary gravestone atop a hill; it went into the only mourner sitting in front of it hugging her knees. She moved not a single muscle, staring ahead deep in thought and unblinking in concentration.

It breathed life into the Doctor, mourning alone on that late afternoon at the gravestone. Written across the front was the name Cadence, her previous life. Below her was the body of the previous Doctor who had given her life so Cadence could become the Doctor.

She was sure her predecessor wouldn't be here. She scarcely spent more than the time it took at her predecessor's grave. Still, the Doctor had things to say and questions to ask.

"You didn't give me much choice. Maybe time didn't give you a choice at all." she spoke aloud, contemplative.

"Still, why is my head full of-" she paused.

She concentrated hard, trying to remember the previous Doctors. How many were there now? It was impossible to count, they all just flew by as fleeting images inside her head. Some of them might have been more than one incarnation, some of them had multiple looks but were all one incarnation.

The sixth one? He looked like the seventh, just once before regenerating. The first one looked like three different men at various points in his life.

It was so hard to keep them all straight. To keep her brain grounded; a task many of the other Doctors had never even bothered with: they let near blatant schizophrenia win out so they could focus on the task at hand.

Still, when the chips were down the Doctors almost always agreed on a solution to a problem. That single minded clarity helped a lot, turning problems from complex socio-political and ethical-moral dilemmas into routine tasks as simple as "2+2" or "What's the next chord in Jane Says?"

With the exception of one of them, who would say things like "Just get some explosives from your companion and blow them up!" or "Try standing in front of a sniper rifle! That usually works."

"You were ready there, right at the end. Still, there was one choice you made. So why... why is my head filled up so?" she asked. She reached out and touched the polished headstone.

Deep inside her, she knew already. Tracing the fingers along the letters of Cadence's name, there were secrets she kept from herself. Things she couldn't admit.

The Doctor had seen planets burn and stars burn out. She had seen things that no pair of eyes should never see; images that grew in fascination and horror as she dwelled and curated them inside her mind.

Friends had died, people were saved, and families had started and ended in her lives; yet here she was, lingering. It left a melancholy exhaustion upon the soul; people change, grow and shrink with time and here you are as constant throughout the universe as the stars and time itself.

And that constant presence that the Doctor was; was it a role to play, a guiding force that always did the right thing? It was always a choice, but often it felt like the universe was held together by an assumption, a metaphorical duct tape for time and space that no matter who the Doctor was they would make the same choices to fix everything.

Surely it would have been enough to transfer just the Doctor, all the other part was unnecessary? She could have been a fresh face full of ideas and business to take care of. The Doctor could have seen the universe anew and loved it all.

But here she was, sitting at a headstone mourning her previous self and stuck with so many questions.

“Did you know then? Did you know what my life needed? Under all the longing and ambitions? There’s no way you could have known but...” in an instant she thought about it.

An old man, a rock and frightened people. A moment in time when he saw into the future perhaps... no. A moment in time when he saw what was important for the first time.

Everything afterward was informed by that moment. Morality...

And yet despite its importance, the memory was fading away with age. As she remembered it, some of the details were so strange; The Doctor’s initial talk with his granddaughter’s teachers could have happened one of two ways... and the moment that was so important? It was grey now, hard to remember and fuzzy.

Tempering that important lesson were new memories from Cadence; of enemies and friends coming together to help the less fortunate in charity. Together they had set aside differences inside soup kitchens and charities to save people’s lives, to grow the future.

“You knew I needed to renew my humanity in that brief moment, didn’t you Cadence?” the Doctor asked with a smile and a tear falling from her eye.

Images rushed in of Cadence holding her child’s hands as he learned to walk. Of failing exams and begging for make-up attempts. Thankful faces in worn out places seeking shelter and help from a regular person.

“You were a much more experienced person than I am, Cadence. You knew the important stuff. Under the lust for adventure...for life, there’s something better: to do what’s right. Isn’t that it? That’s why I have all this in here? I’m not sure because...” she paused and hung her head.

Her previous self hadn't dwelled on her memories upon becoming the Doctor. But there was something about Cadence's memories. Something so important: something that the Doctor couldn't admit to herself. It was just off to the side of her thoughts, just missing.

"You're almost there. Come on." said Cadence in her mind, a memory gently rising to the forefront for her concentration to get lost in.

It was College, and she was walking to class with Dors; Billy's bi-... no, just Dors will do. The two of them were talking; they were always together in those days. Took the same classes, had the same major... even alternated being mar... No, let's move on.

Today they'd be giving mock-investment pitches in class to their classmates, acting as "Angel Investors"; people with too much money on their hands looking to fund someone else's idea.

Dors had always been so calm, cool and collected. She had a pitch for a better product, she had more people anticipating it... she had better grades in the class already. Cadence was a little jealous of her friend. She could do anything; and do it easily. She did her presentation and received a hearty applause; and then Cadence was called on by chance to follow.

Standing in front of the class with a presentation slide her hands shook. The projector glared in her eyes, and her head drew a blank. She was terrified of failure, scared of what everyone would think about her simple idea she had worked into the small hours of the morning for months on. For a brief moment standing up there she wondered how Dors would have presented this, frozen in fear.

And then she did it anyway.

"Today, I'm going to talk to you all about a project that is near and dear to me... a Soup Kitchen." she drew a long, audible breath and flipped to the next slide. So far so good.

"There are over 3,000,000 children on this very planet that die each year of hunger. Ladies and Gentlemen, that's not a condemnation to make you feel bad; that's a simple fact. On our planet alone there are Soup Kitchens funded by the world, national and local governments that run over 700 people per day through them; and yet 3,000,000 children die each year."

She looked over at Dors, who gave her a thumbs-up and her fiance who was nodding, stone faced.

"I ask you all to indulge me for a brief moment now..." she said flipping a slide to a picture of herself working out of her own kitchen to feed homeless children. There was a chuckle or two at the unflattering look of Cadence in a hairnet.

"When I realized that 3,000,000 children die per year of hunger I put on a hairnet and I started to try and help the problem myself. More than I care about this class, more than my anything I've done in my life, I'm proud of that picture. But..." she flipped a slide. The next slide was the same picture of herself, cut out of the picture and pasted against a white background.

"I'm alone." she said, pausing to let people take in the gravity of her struggle.

"But tomorrow I will be doing this again. Next week I'll be doing this whenever I have time. Soup Kitchens across the world will be doing this across the world funded much better with better resources, but still falling short." she said looking outward. She could only barely see the vague outlines of her classmates in the dark, but their posture was attentive, emboldening her. She took confidence in that, and flipped to the next slide.

There were children, looking out towards the audience. A group of 20 or so.

"Today, tomorrow and as long as this planet works the way that it does, taxes are going to be taken out; but we can do more. We can set up a worldwide private network to invest in tomorrow; free of messages or influence, just decent people doing the right thing." she flipped back to the slide of her working.

"I'm not going to ask you to put on a hairnet and come help me out tomorrow..." she flipped back to the children.

"I'm asking you to invest in yourselves. In the children you see on the screen who will be in those chairs you're sitting in. In the eyes who will tell your story until eternity comes because you decided to do a decent thing today. That's what I'm asking for in my first round of funding..." she said as she flipped forward and moved into the business plan and mock 3 year statistics.

That day she walked out of the class with the most mock funding and a perfect grade, even above Dors. Dors' fiance would end up falling for her watching that speech. The professor watching the class was so moved that she started up an actual fund for the idea.

Cadence won that day by being herself; by being passionate and fighting for what she believed in. It was the happiest single achievement in her life.

In the days afterward she had lost so much from that moment. She lost her friend, her family, her job... but most of all she lost her compassion to a bottle of wine somewhere along the way.

"Why?!?" The Doctor screamed at the gravestone.

"Why did I see that? I just... I don't understand how that's applicable!"

She stared ahead and pictured the previous Doctor.

Cadence as the Doctor had always tried to emulate her predecessor. At first it was because it was what she thought people expected upon meeting the Doctor. Then it was because it was who she expected the Doctor to be.

She was strong, she was kind...

But she kept people at arm's length with her collected facade like Dors.

She thought back a lifetime to the situations where the previous Doctor's confidence carried her. She was scared often. More often than she showed definitely. And it caused mistrust and resentment as secrets often do.

In that moment she saw the previous Doctor's flaws: worn out faces she couldn't comfort in their time, losses she was afraid to feel inside that inhibited her.

Now... now it was as if there were moments when Cadence shone through. No longer cool, Cadence was there pouring tears out from behind her eyes. Cadence had changed her outward presentation; Reminding her of something important.

No, to do something: let people in. Compassion and empathy to good people. That's how she won.

"Alright, that's it isn't it? That's what separates me from her?" she asked pointing downward to the previous Doctor, cold in the grave beneath her.

She stood up and sighed. It was an important lesson, and she would probably have to remind herself it as many times as possible as it went against the Doctor's better nature sometimes.

Perhaps the best way to move forward was to make some memories that would fit this incarnation now. A good place to start was the places and people that mattered to Cadence.

She walked towards the TARDIS and smiled, looking over at Miaki hanging upside down from the 'Police Public Call Box' sign.

"We're going on a... short trip. There's someone I'd like you to meet. We'll be back before Illithica notices we're gone." she said smiling.

"Who are we meeting? Friends? Lovers? Nothing?" Miaki said. His question was more of a courtesy since he had the ability to see inside her mind.

She thought her answer for a hair of a second. "All the above." she said, admitting.

"Would the previous Doctor approve?" he asked as she unlocked the door.

"I don't think I give a damn either way. I'm the Doctor, and this is the right thing to do." said the Doctor. She grabbed a present: a shirt of a giant cat holding onto a rocket ship taking off.

They were going to see her son; and it was definitely her son. It was still her life and her memories and her time to waste. And she would fall in love with everything about that.

Framing Story: Part 7

Let Them Breathe

by Neo

“Well, time’s up. Start your explaining.”

Jack smiled in response, and walked over to part of the room Gwen had explored earlier. He picked up that long case of nine or so tapes she’d dropped earlier, the one she hadn’t been able to get open, and effortlessly slid out the tapes from it.

“How’d you do that? I couldn’t find an opening.”

“It opened because we watched more tapes. There’s an order to all this.”

“And who decided that? You?”

“In a way. Look, I’ll do what you asked for earlier, and I won’t interrupt these ones at all.”

“And the more we watch, the sooner we can get out of here?”

“Something like that.”

“Alright, alright, go on then. Let’s watch.”

“That’s what we’re doing? Watching?”

“Yes, it is. What’s gotten into you? Will you put in the damn tape already?”

Jack nodded, did as she asked, and said no more.

The Revolution Games

by Morphant

What if the Shabogans led a coup against the Council of Time Lords in a story featuring a Sarah Bolger Rani and a Tilda Swinton Doctor from the far future, connected to but set before the 'Course Correction' and 'Nacho Doctor' stories from this anthology?

A young red-haired woman looked over the people of the great Citadel. This was the home of the Time Lords, but today marked the overthrow of an archaic establishment. Swarms of Shabogans stood before their new leader, silent, awaiting her words of wisdom and power. This was surely the largest inauguration ceremony Gallifrey had ever seen, and there hadn't even been a global election.

"Mine is the face of the revolution. I stand on this pedestal today not just as the newly-inaugurated Lady President, not just as a politician, but as a reminder that Gallifreyans at any point in their lives, from even the most challengingly deprived backgrounds, can become whatever they want to be."

The Lady President stood at just over five feet tall and carried a dainty Irish, almost American accent. She appeared to radiate youthful, morally strong energy, sort of the epitome of the recent liberation.

A day before, a Shabogan plot to assassinate the Lord President had been realised. Ex-working-class politicians brought down the High Council from the top, some Councillors murdered, some incarcerated. The outsiders were granted access to the dome and the coup d'état continued until no Time Lords remained in office. This placement of Presidency was in the will of the public: a woman who had grown up in poverty, studied at the Academy, gained status and rebelled against the Rassilonic regime. There was no lie in her words: she was the face of the revolution. A woman of the people.

"We all walk the same ground and breathe the same air. We are the people of this planet, united. Today marks a day of freedom for all - therefore my first act of Presidency will be marking this date as the Day of Emancipation."

This statement incited a cheer of approval from the audience. The arena reverberated the sound of the audience's agreement as it quietened.

One of the marked traits of her distinction from other politicians was her lack of Gallifreyan armour. She wore a baby blue dress that met at the bottom of her knees,

and her head collar, while unmistakably Time Lord, was a sparkling white like no other councillor had ever worn. The flower in her hair oddly contrasted the fire in her veins but she owned the look: one of innocence and beauty under full control.

“For years now, Gallifrey has been in need of healing. Fret no more. This is Gallifrey – *our* Gallifrey. Our home. We are one world – an alliance under my rule.

“The rule of the Rani.”

The crowd cheered once again.

The Doctor crossed her ankles and sank further back into her armchair, the fire in front crackling, a grandfather clock tick-tocking soothingly somewhere behind her. She had poured herself a cup of lemon tea, which rested on a doyley on the table to her right. The room was as cosy as one could picture an early 1900s sitting room to be – it brimmed with red from all angles; a red carpet, mahogany-red mantelpiece, red drapes along gridded colonial windows. On top of the mantelpiece was a pot of the sonic screwdrivers she had collected over the years, shimmering red and blue and green, beside a framed photograph of a young Draconian man – an old friend. Above them hung a painting of a six-legged horse. Contemporary. By the window, a grand piano which acted as her escape on lonely winter nights. She had a bookshelf across the stretch of an entire wall, and a ladder in the corner to reach books at fifteen feet. The books on the wall were restocked by a paid librarian once a month, and she never had the heart to tell them she’d usually already read around three quarters of those delivered.

Physically, she was perhaps the most alien of her many incarnations so far. Her skin was an Albino white and her hair was only a shade higher. The eyebrows of this face were barely visible as her skin seemed to glow – she literally shined white. The green of her eyes were the clearest, possibly the only, variation of colour on her body besides her clothes. Her septum curved upwards and dipped into a pointed nose above thin, bitter lips. She wore a black studded-metal button shirt, the top two undone, with white pinstripes. Over it, a deep blue knee-length overcoat that almost glittered with blueish dust. Pinned to the exaggeratedly large lapels was a silver six-point star. It was a universal symbol for peace. Around her waist was a belt with a similarly silver Byzantine belt buckle, threaded through fitted black trousers which, with two folds at the ankles, met dark brown boots with black infinity bows and two-centimetre-high heels.

Darkness was beginning to fall outside, and her natural instincts kicked in. Tiredness had not been something the Doctor had experienced a lot in her life, but she had lived for so long now, longer than anyone should. Thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands

of years more than she was supposed to. She had opted for this life around two hundred years ago, after the loss of her travelling companion, K'hath. He had been a Draconian born into slavery, from which the Doctor saved him. As though repaying the favour, he gave his life to save her on Telex. Another genesis of the Cybermen. Another death of a friend.

She had, after K'hath's death, taken up residence on a planet in the Bermuda System, called Serenitum. It had Earth-like qualities: its axis was tilted at 23.5 degrees from the plane of its orbit around a sun, meaning the summers were slightly warmer and the winters slightly colder. It was reminiscent enough of a planet she loved, with people not quite so angry all the time, for her to feel comfortable. Humans were always trying to outdo one another – this planet was far more tranquil.

Reading and relaxing had proven not to be such a bad way to spend her days. She was, and had been for two centuries, simply Gallifreyan. Officially no longer a Time Lord. And it had been the biggest load of weight off her shoulders.

The Doctor lifted the grand leather-bound book of poetry in her hands – this, however, had not been pulled from the renewed bookshelf. It came from her personal shelves, and had been gifted to her by Edgar Allan Poe after the Doctor's fifty-pin strike had won them the intergalactic bowling league, in around her hundredth incarnation. Hundreds of years ago, now. As she opened the hard cover, a light wind began to blow through her sitting room doors. A tell-tale sign. She prepared herself for the electrical wheezing of a time travel capsule. Not her own TARDIS – she waited downstairs, tall and blue as ever. Judging by its modest hum, it was a newer model, perhaps a Type 507. A Time Lord's.

The Doctor stood fast, readying herself for what would happen next. The teacup beside her rattled and the room had begun to vibrate. She turned on her heel to face the door, chin high, looking at the doorway through her nose.

The humming stopped. The Doctor, on a rush of adrenaline, internalised her anger and confusion. They were weaknesses.

Clapping against the hardwood floor of the hallway opposite, the trespasser seemed to have a third step. As he finally entered the door frame, the Doctor realised that the third step had been the noise made by a long black cane with a metal end, carried by a gentleman in a full suit topped with a bowler hat.

The Doctor looked directly into his eyes before he could begin.

“No.”

“Doctor, this is a matter of univ-”

“I'm not coming.”

With which the wise old woman spun back around, picked up her book and sunk melodramatically into her chair.

"Gallifrey has been subject t-"

"You are interrupting my reading," she said calmly, finishing the second half of her response by almost singing: "Please find the exit in the same place you found the entrance, thank you."

"Doctor!"

He shouted. She had been polite, respectful, to the point, and he shouted.

She stood up again, offended, and strode over until she was inches from the Time Lord's face, her own distorted into one of pure rage. "You have broken into my property, disrupted my routine and raised your voice in my sitting room. Typically I would offer an intruder a drink, but you have also caused my tea to go cold. That and the fact that I would never go out of my way to make a High Councillor feel welcomed. Although apparently," she muttered, "you're quite content to welcome yourself."

"There *is* no High Council."

"Pah!" She sounded in disbelief. "That'll be the day."

The Time Lord raised his hand and lifted the bowler hat from his head to place it against his chest. He appeared almost solemn. "I have come to you for help, Doctor."

Breathing steadily, the tall, impossible being raised her head again, staring into his eyes in question.

"This is the truth of Rassilon."

Eyebrows raised, the Doctor pouted, making an expression as if to show her surprise. She made her way back to the armchair. From the table beside it, she picked up her teacup, raised it to her lips and sipped, immediately to spit it back out into the cup. Stone cold.

"How?" she said.

"How what?"

"How is there no High Council, what happened?"

The messenger gestured towards a wooden chair against the wall he stood at, questioning if he might use it. The Doctor waved a hand in acceptance and carelessness for the matter. Hardly seemed like the time for leisure, she thought.

He carried it over to the armchair with him. Realising his intentions, the Doctor sat down in her own chair, letting him take the seat now opposite.

“Three days ago, the Shabogans led a coup against the Council.”

The Doctor smiled, she herself having been a Shabogan as a child. “Good start.”

“Please Doctor. Don’t interrupt.”

He had tired eyes, the Doctor observed. She could safely assume he hadn’t come out on the better side of this ordeal. She opted to let him speak.

“The coup was successful. The largest of their working men stormed the entrances to the Capitol – Time Lords and Shabogans alike were killed in the fight. At first we had assumed this coup must have been planned for decades, as the technology they entered with was far too advanced by their standards. The Chancellery did their best against them but they kept coming – more than we’d ever have expected. At this point, the High Council had called a committee meeting. We had no choice but to send in the military: a fatal mistake. Many troops had come from these impoverished lifestyles, or were at least related to Shabogans. We simply added fuel to the flames. Almost half of our own men had turned on us. The revolt now had an army larger than the Capitol’s.

“I was not involved in this situation, but it has been promoted as one of the highlights of the overthrow. Lord President Titos was rushed out through underground tunnels beneath the city. According to the rebels, he had three men by his side – one of which had been involved in the revolution. Said man turned his gun on the President and his other aide once far enough from the Cloisters and returned to the city in safety.”

The Doctor had not appeared to react to his retelling of events. She was sat forward in her seat with two fingers against her lips, thumb under the bottom of her chin to prop up her head; her legs crossed at the knees.

“And what of the people like you?” she asked.

“Might I remind you, Doctor, that you yourself were once a Time Lord? You chose to drop the title yourself millennia ago – but not the regenerative abilities, the Council noted.”

Narrowing her eyes, the woman snarled.

“As the figures stand, around six million Time Lords are incarcerated in cells or rebel camps. That leaves two and a half million dead.”

Making her point quickly, the Doctor sat forward. “But that’s not right, is it, that figure? Because you’re right here: a Time Lord messenger.”

“The figure is correct. A small band of us survived – seven, to be exact. I was working with TARDIS designers and mechanics on early Type 500s. When we heard about the

coup, we each took one and scattered ourselves in search of help. I've maintained a connection with the reports. You were my first choice, Doctor."

The light ticking of the grandfather clock in the room behind them was the only sound around them as the Doctor considered for a moment. She licked her lips inwardly and tilted her head slightly, leaning back in her chair. "What for?"

"Save us, Doctor."

Just as she was about to laugh, the messenger raised an argument in defence. "It is not . . . desirable, but perhaps it is time that the Shabogans be granted more freedom of the city. But you must agree, Doctor, that a bloody revolution is not the way."

"It's also not my business. Get out of my house."

"You can't run forever, Doctor!"

"Says who?" She locked eyes with the messenger. "Maybe the Shabogans were right to do what they did. Maybe the Time Lords should let their own history take its course!"

The messenger glanced at her, reading her expressions for a moment, and resolved to stand, ready to leave. He looked more sombre than before – defeated. He tipped his hat in respect and made his way out of the room, this time with his walking stick under his arm.

As he left, the room around her suddenly seemed far less comfortable than it had been before. It was as though she was out of place here – just like all those years ago, when she was the Doctor who saved people, she felt there was somewhere she needed to be. But she was so old now. She'd lived so much and suffered too many losses. As though something above would give her an answer, the Doctor looked up.

The answer, of course, lied within herself. The Shabogans had got it wrong. Somebody would have to take control of their new government and steer them in the right direction.

"What was your name?" she shouted out, realising she had never asked.

The messenger paused, the handle of a mahogany cabinet-disguised TARDIS in his hand. He felt an optimistic smile creep onto his lips and stopped it. "Dracius," he answered, with a soft 'c'.

"And why should I believe you? How can I know for sure this isn't a trick to bring me home for trial – again?"

"Because I am begging."

Gallifrey wasn't in need of saving, she decided. It simply needed a push in the right direction. It was long overdue that the Shabogans should be treated as equals on a planet whose regime leader had officially died thousands of years ago. Whoever had led

this revolution, she thought, was likely a considered person with good aspirations – but limits needed to be understood. Someone as reasonable as the Doctor could surely teach a revolutionary the ropes about regeneration- and time travel-equality.

She went out into the corridor to meet eyes with Dracius again, a decision made. A rush of life ran through her. For the first time in two hundred years, she was the Doctor again.

“So that’s it, eh?” she said, hand over his, pulling the door open to the sound of engines humming. “Six TARDIS mechanics, a Time Lord messenger and an old woman with a screwdriver. We’re going to out-riot the rioters.”

Looking back, the Doctor sighed. She’d have to finish Edgar’s book later.

Course Correction

by Nacho

What if 'Hanky Panky', from Shit Trips (Volume 1) and starring a Doctor as played by pornstar Skin Diamond, got a sequel?

"Hello there! It's good to see you and your... uh, well your face. Right, don't quite know where I meant to go with that one." said the Doctor, looking over to Patty in the rocking chair by the coat rack for some interjection. Patty was quietly reading the comics from the paper, not paying attention so the Doctor pressed on looking forward toward you, the reader, with an intense but excited look.

"Picture this, you're walking back to the kitchen after dinner carrying a few dishes. On the counter is a bunch of books placed precariously by your assistant-" started the Doctor.

"I've only done that once!" shouted Patty without looking up.

"It's a hypothetical!" she replied before looking back towards you. Behind her she was furiously scribbling on a chalkboard with one hand, the board blocked from your vision by her slender frame and long green coat placed at just the right angle.

"So you walk by the books on the way to the sink to wash your dishes, and without touching them they fall. Worse still when you go to look, the dishes fall from your stack as well. Now, without an acting force on the books you wonder why that happened in a slightly frustrated way, but as the you hear the porcelain hit the floor you fear the worst." she paused, reaching with her other hand to grab and finish a spot of tea, her other arm still furiously scribbling away.

"When your eyes view that scenario you're even more confused: the dishes are fine on the ground with no damage. So you are free after some cleaning to continue your night with barely a feather ruffled." she paused again, this time both arms at her side while she reoriented her whole body towards you and gestured with one hand, chalk in it so that you know you have her full attention now.

"So my question is this: who put those notes and phrases together? Who really wrote Beethoven's Fifth?" she said with a serious expression like she'd put together a startling revelation.

“That’s the wrong conclusion, Doctor!” Patty said getting up and walking towards the Doctor, her eyes rolling with a big sigh.

“What?!? Oh, yes. Sorry, reader; that was a slight trick of the mind. What I meant to say is: Why did the books fall? Why didn’t the dishes break?” said the Doctor, her voice showing some audible growing frustration. Patty promptly slapped her across the face and she regained her composure after a second to recoil in pain.

“Spooky Action at a Distance. Einstein’s ultimate and funny way of saying ‘I don’t know’. Y’know, it’s a funny thing about you humans; always looking to quantify things and notice them, place them into patterns even if they aren’t. ‘Spooky Action’ is one such human theory that other races, not even Time Lords have ever thought about and it’s the hinge of what today’s adventure is about, dear reader.” said the Doctor smiling.

“Ooooh, that’s about as close as the science-y side of her gets to a compliment. Maybe she really does like us.” Patty said, winking towards you.

“You know I enjoy your company, dear. That’s the highest compliment I can pay. After all, I don’t go venturing with Sontarans now do I?” said the Doctor, smiling. She leaned into Patty for a snog.

“Doctor, shouldn’t you be explaining this? After all this is supposed to be a short trip.” said Patty, looking and gesturing over to you. The Doctor snapped back her attention to you and smiled.

“What Einstein theorized is that there was an unquantifiable force between you and the books that caused them to fall. This force wasn’t independently describable: it wasn’t you acting on the books or the books acting on you, but rather a force between you two that was situationally generated and unquantifiable by the ‘then’ known laws of Physics. Quite spooky if it just happens, right?” she said looking back and smiling.

You raised your hand to ask a question but Patty gently and politely blocks it whispering “she doesn’t like questions before she finishes, luv.” You notice a slight shake in The Doctor’s hand.

“And in the time since humans have taken the time to fill in the time with electromagnetism, quantum physics with entanglement; but electromagnetism doesn’t really affect books all that much, does it? No, and that’s why Spooky Action is still relevant here: the gap of ‘I don’t know’ is too incredible of a-uuh gap to fill. Luckily, you know a scientist with an incredible knowledge of the fourth dimension and has her f-foot in many alternate dimensions with a wider perspective of the beauty of who, er... what

the universe holds and-" she paused and got a very frustrated look on her face, her brow furrowing intensely

Without a second's notice she ran up to Patty and began snogging her, grabbing her hand and placing it firmly on her breast. It was an intense, passionate kiss and her hand was guiding Patty to be forceful with her. After a second or two she reached around and seized Patty's ass with her other hand, giving a soft moan as she kissed even more passionately. After that moan she immediately broke it off and went back to the board, razor focused.

"And as such, I have a perfect explanation to explain Spooky Action at a Distance: parallel universes" she said before stepping back and gesturing towards the board with a huge, impressive display drawn out on it. And a small stick figure with breasts on it.

You briefly wonder why you didn't look at it during the snogging, but The Doctor gestures back to steal your attention away again.

On the left hand side a single line is drawn that splits into two and then a third line off shooting from one of the two others. Kinda like in Back to the Future 2. Shut up.

The lines are drawn parallel on the board and individually labeled "Universe A, B and C". In the space between the lines A and B and then again between B and C are two big shaded areas labeled "Parallel Correction Buffers". At the bottom in capital letters and underlined is a sentence, "TIME LORDS ARE NOT WATCHING THE FORCES OF PARALLEL REALITIES".

"Right, so here's the background. Let's say universe B is the main timeline. At a point it splits off into universe A with an event so catastrophic like... some human stopping the Hindenburg Blimp from going down in flames. That didn't happen in universe B, so it creates a parallel timeline where it crashed. Both universes are happy to go along their merry way not touching each other. But then, someone in universe B stops the Time War from ending correctly and we're left with a completely non-violent Doctor. That catastrophically changes reality too and creates another different universe, universe C." she pauses and nods at you, looking in your eye to make sure you're getting all this. Confident in your understanding, she continues.

"Now, not everything that happens in universe A is going to happen exactly the same as the other universes: maybe you're late for work and forget to brush your teeth one day. That's not exactly enough to cause a parallel universe, is it? So you have this buffer here between universe A and B to account for small, inconsequential changes. Maybe

this leads to someone handing you a mint to give you fresh breath for the day. That is the universe's form of course correction." said The Doctor before she paused, waiting.

After a second or so, Patty piqued up from being dazed still from the snog and exclaimed "Oh!".

"But Doctor, what's all this got to do with the books and dishes falling?" she asked robotically, as if it was a rehearsed line. You'd call her out on asking a question, but it's funny how bad that exchange was plotted.

The Doctor frowned, knowing her banter attempt was seen through.

"Well, I'm glad you asked. The kind of force that creates that correction is what I believe is the force Einstein quantified as Spooky Action. Since the objects are the exact same object across universes, a force of interdimensional inertia means that they want to stay the same across universes. You may have walked by the books harmlessly in universe B, but in universe A they were bumped and fell to the floor; as such they fell in universe B because of the correction. Likewise this caused you to drop the dishes in universe B, but in universe A and C you didn't drop or break anything; so in universe B the dishes landed and had an alternate force acting on it in just such a way as to prevent them from breaking. At its simplest form, this is the unknown force of Spooky Action at a distance; the quantifiable distance being now between two universes." she said smiling. She paused for a second to catch her breath.

"And because this force phenomenon has only ever been slightly observed by humans, it's completely and utterly unknown by the Time Lords. They see these forces as mere coincidences." said The Doctor before pointing at the last sentence on the board, "TIME LORDS ARE NOT WATCHING THE FORCES OF PARALLEL REALITIES."

"So we're going to exploit the hell out of it?" asked Patty, in that sickeningly sweet way that implies mischief.

"We're going to exploit the hell out of it." The Doctor affirmed confidently.

You raise your hand to finally ask your question, but The Doctor gently guides it back to your side.

"Now now, we need to save a little room for the story too." says The Doctor, winking at you.

Another time inside the TARDIS, the Doctor was sulking about the console room. Staring at her feet and pacing, she had a glint of frustration in her eyes as she paced circles around the console. Patty walked over to console her, perhaps put her arm

around The Doctor; but as she reached over The Doctor randomly and violently slammed her fist onto the edge of the console. Reflexively, Patty pulled back with her eyes darting away to make herself unassuming should the Doctor turn around and notice her there. The Doctor usually never noticed her there.

“Fixed points in time! What nonsense! What’s the point of being a Time Lord if I’m at the mercy of Time?!?” she shouted in frustration, looking at the sky.

“I hate to say it, but you’re not the only Time Lord in existence Dearie. You still have to play nice with the other children, luv.” said Patty from behind her.

“I pride myself on being a creature of logic, Patty. I don’t see the logic in letting a child be hit in the middle of a road, do you? No... No I like to think I pick my friends well enough to pick them up from such a predicament and carry them back to safety! And yet here the time lords are watching the proverbial toddler in traffic and what are they most worried about? Making sure the cars aren’t stopping. That’s illogical!” she said throwing her arms into the air in frustration.

Patty came up behind her and began rubbing her shoulders, causing The Doctor to roll her neck reflexively to adjust the muscles to her massage. As she rubbed Patty was encouraging the Doctor with kind phrases to boost her confidence. The Doctor was taking them in, but storing them away for a time in which she would truly need them. She hadn’t quite given up on this yet.

Instead, her mind was buzzing with calculations and possibility. Inside her head she could see a complete map of the stars, with numbers and calculations flying by her as astral bodies whizzing by. At once she saw a meteor whiz by her mind’s eye and explode behind her in a friction with the gasses of some kind of cloud. Inside the explosion she saw fire and felt heat against her skin and as it passed through her she felt numbers inside her mind.

She worked through them with intensity, solving equations and seeing possibility in them all. But something was growing: frustration, anger. She saw paradox scenarios wiped away by the Time Lords, she saw a plane crash and a great loss; but most of all she saw futility in her plans.

As she backed away from the meteor’s explosion she saw loss and slowly she saw a few stars go out. In that moment she stopped seeing, stopped thinking; in that moment, she felt. The Doctor felt the massage and her neck roll, her muscles tense and release against the massage to adjust themselves and make the rub more effective.

She felt the star map expand and contract around her with the movements of her body inside her mind. Stars reignited as inspiration burst around her like a supernova. In a single moment as both shoulders adjusted and shrugged to Patty's hands and released to her movement, she opened her eyes wide to an epiphany.

"Spooky action at a distance." she said, hardly believing the solution herself and what it meant in concept.

"Doctor, were you even listening?" Patty stated in frustration.

"What? Oh yes and thank you dear." The Doctor said as she walked over to a certain section of the console and produced two in ear communicators.

"So what's Spooky action at a distance?" asked Patty, curiously looking over The Doctor's shoulder.

"Patty dear, it's a speech that I'd like to make to an audience. Not just to you, but someone we both consider to be very intelligent and kind." The Doctor said before looking to the right as if staring straight into a hard camera. Patty gave a thumbs up in the same direction. Instantly for the purposes of the story Patty knew what that was because I don't have another 3 pages to explain that and it was much cooler to do at the beginning.

"And anyways, why's that going to help you with a fixed point in time that the Time Lords are watching? They know you're going to go back to try and save that plane full of people, and they're just gonna stop you gettin' in like a bird into a glass window." said Patty confused.

"Well, let's take stock of the situation. Right now we're trying to stop a plane crash between Russia and China. It's full of people and we bugged it up the first time, leading to it becoming fixed in this universe. However, according to the readouts it didn't happen in the adjacent parallel universes meaning it's not fixed in the other universes either; and if it didn't then we could save everyone by making sure the little coincidences that lead to the crash don't happen in THIS universe. You see, it's the culmination of the coincidences of the two adjacent universes that lead to the crash so by preventing them from happening "there" spooky action at a distance will prevent them from happening "here". We could prevent any of it from happening without the Time Lords even catching a whiff of it. And the best part is? By the time we have changed it, they won't be able to touch it: it's already a fixed point in time." said The Doctor, pleased with herself and her shenanigans.

“Doctor, you have stopped to think about the consequences of if we fail? We might be cause two more plane crashes that are fixed points and make things worse!” said Patty, worried.

“Patty, I never think about the consequences of what I do-” The Doctor started.

Patty sighed. She knew that all too well.

“Because the consequences of inaction are much more terrible a stain on the soul.” said The Doctor, looking down. Patty embraced her compassionately. Maybe there were always going to be things The Doctor didn’t tell her; but Patty hoped The Doctor understood there were things that she would never have to say.

In a Russian airport, a stewardess walked toward the departure gate with confidence. Dressed exactly the same and walking the exactly the same path at the same time, The Doctor and Patty were fulfilling the exact same role in parallel universes, connected by earpieces to communicate across realities.

“A new stewardess? And quite the looker I see. Welcome aboard!” said the desk attendant as Patty boarded the plane. Patty smiled at his remark and blew him a kiss.

“Interesting, a new stewardess. And quite exotic to the eye.” said the desk attendant as The Doctor boarded the plane. The Doctor ducked her head in an attempt to be inconspicuous and avoid eye contact as much as possible.

The two of them had a quick list of events to ensure the plane didn’t crash: The relief pilot doesn’t invite his children to sit at the controls for a spell, the children don’t disengage the autopilot, prevent the plane from going into a dive or at the very end of the events correct the plane from stalling by over steering.

It was unfortunate then to both The Doctor and Patty to find the two children sitting in relief chairs inside the cockpit, already buckled and ready for takeoff.

“Doctor, they’re already here!” whispered Patty facing away from anyone who might notice her talking to herself.

“Mine are too unfortunately. Just keep calm; we have quite a few chances to get this right.” she said under her breath.

“I always get this right! No need to worry you’re in safe hands.” said the relief pilot with a laugh from his gut and a friendly hand on her shoulder.

Despite knowing this pilot was the one that caused the plane crash, The Doctor couldn't help but find his confidence infectious. She smiled back at him and took a stewardess chair behind the cockpit door. Patty did the same in her universe.

The main pilot and copilot were in the chair first, and for a few hours it would be smooth sailing. To pass the hours Patty even played games with the children and had fun teaching them to play poker. After an hour and a half they were beating her every hand. The Doctor took notice of this over the communicator and smiled: Patty always wore her emotions so innocently on her sleeve; of course even children could see through her during poker. It was something so inherently human; The Doctor felt envy at that. Perhaps that was the reason The Doctor was so guarded around Patty.

"Miss, how does turbulence work?" asked the relief pilot's son.

"And how do you correct against it?" asked the relief pilot's daughter.

The Doctor instinctively started putting together an explanation in her mind to whisper into Patty's ear, but stopped when she heard her begin on her own.

Patty drew a playing card from the deck and put it on the floor between the three of them, askew so each person had a corner facing them. She then put her finger on the corner facing herself and gestured to the children to do the same with their corners.

"Picture this, it's warm Gallifreyan night with the stars exploding brilliant lights of purple and yellow. A meteor storm cuts through the lights a brilliant lime green and for a brief moment the whistling of the sounds in the night sky shimmer out the brief melody of your favorite songs; on most nights it is a song so gentle and quiet that it would put you to a relaxing, gentle sleep." said Patty.

The daughter piqued up. "My favorite song wouldn't put me to sleep. My favorite song is Back in the USSR by The Beatles." Patty smiled at her comment, but ignored it otherwise.

"Against this wondrous backdrop, you ask your father if he would help you hang a kite in the sky so you can have a little piece of yourself in that work of art. So you go out and you get a kite into the sky, and for a moment it's wondrous! You have complete control" Patty said as she pulled the card down an inch toward herself.

"But oh no! Suddenly out of nowhere your kite is pulled to the side by the wind. You're still giving it downward direction by your string, but watch what happens when you really have control over one direction at a time: can you pull the card towards you while you

pull down?" asked Patty to the son. He did and the card went sideways as it moved, acted on by two forces. She then reset and let the daughter have a turn.

"A plane is in fact no different. Sure, you have the engines thrusting you forward instead of pulling you along, but there's little to no protection from a powerful gust to the side. That's what turbulence is, and to correct against it, your father has to use a map with precise flight details and powerful satellites in space to find his exact location and to steer the plane back on course." said Patty smiling.

The Doctor released a mental sigh. Another slip in her memory, a crack in the facade that was Patty's persona, and she hadn't even noticed. This one was deeper and closer than ever. Her intelligence leaked out, conveying an advanced concept with applicability and accessibility. She wondered how long it would be before she had to tell Patty the truth: before she would have to admit her own guilty conscience. Not this time at least, she thought to herself with an outward sigh.

After the pilot change, The Doctor and Patty were both sipping coffee nearly in sync across the universes leaning against the same corner of the same walls.

"Doctor." Patty started, whispering into her receiver so as not to be noticed and sound crazy.

"Yes, Patty?" The Doctor replied in full voice. No one was around her so she could afford the luxury.

"These are kind people. I think you were right to try so hard." said Patty with a smile The Doctor could hear in her whisper.

"Patty, I always try my best for everyone. Don't let me fool you: I travel with you and I like you best. Life is a beautiful thing and I wish I could say I always knew that; but even though I wouldn't shove every single person into the Tardis door that I run across, everyone deserves to live in peace and I would do my best to make that happen." said The Doctor. On the other side of the line Patty was tearing up a smidge.

She also wondered if she meant "you" as in Patty herself or the royal "you" as in humanity.

The confidant moment was cut short before Patty could respond by a terrible banking to the right in both universes.

"Doctor!" said Patty, panicking.

"Yes, I felt it too. To the controls, Patty!" said The Doctor already springing into action.

Inside the cockpit was the relief pilot's daughter, already at the controls and steering. The Copilot was standing up, not paying attention to the fact that the girl had disengaged the autopilot.

"What in blazes are you doing?!?" said The Doctor, questioning the copilot and pointing at the girl at the controls.

"She's just pretending. It's completely fine." the copilot responded to Patty.

"The plane just banked hard to the right at this little girl's turn, you stu-" Patty started.

Without warning the plane shook again, jostling Patty and The Doctor to a wall on the left and giving Patty a nasty bump. It took them both a second to get back on their feet.

Patty and The Doctor instinctively grabbed the little girl at the controls in their respective universe and guided her out of the chair before sitting down and attempting to correct the course.

For The Doctor it was as simple as sonicizing the autopilot back on with her sonic screwdriver once she was in the chair. She was already halfway through the solution when Patty's voice interrupted her thoughts.

"Doctor, what do I do?" asked Patty.

"Simple, you just sonic the autopilot ba-" said The Doctor.

"I don't have a sonic screwdriver, Doctor!" Patty said exasperated.

The Doctor's eyes went wide. Why didn't Patty have a sonic screwdriver? Surely they didn't just share it all the time and... oh.

The Doctor's mind cleared again, this time completely blocking out Patty's panic. She saw the universe again, and the stars around her. This time she zoomed over to a distant star and stood in front of it. One by one flares cast off from the star like mighty ocean waves, crashing against and enveloping the Doctor. As each one hit her, a different aspect of the plane's information came to the forefront: schematics, specifications, the comfort ratings on the passenger chairs until finally she got hit by the flare that brought forward the navigation system.

She frantically searched through the information, her mind going through the entire beginner's manual 2 and a half times and scanning each diagram like a laser. Uselessly however, the manual revealed nothing of consequence to her. She was about to search another star when she felt a heat graze her face.

A comet flew by, an idea she couldn't quite grasp; but as she saw it pass right over her head she had just enough time to grab it by the tail and hold on for dear life. Seconds later it led her straight into a supernova, crash landing in the heart of the explosion. There she saw what she needed: an exact map of the atmospheric conditions over the mountains of the Kuznetsk Alatau on March 23 1994.

"Don't touch a thing! The autopilot is working and if you touch it you'll deactivate it!" said The Doctor in a panic. Like magic the plane silently guided itself back on course like it was never a problem at all.

The Doctor's mind worked in an odd sense of overdrive when panicked: she could spend days searching the universe, looking for solutions while under pressure; though less than a few seconds would pass in real time. Coming out of it always made her feel like she was down to the last second.

Back inside her mental universe she created a small moon inside her head and forced it into orbit around her vision, containing a very important thought: Patty has no sonic screwdriver. Now as she searched the universe for solutions she would factor in that moon for the time being.

Outside the copilot nudged her out of her trance.

"Who are you talking to? Who are you?" asked the copilot, standing up and eyeing her suspiciously.

Instinctively, the Doctor and Patty both produced a wallet with psychic paper.

"I'm sorry for the deception, but I felt a problem and had to react." said Patty.

"A foreign pilot who took a job as a stewardess. A guardian angel, I'd say. Welcome aboard." said the copilot to Patty, warming immediately. Patty excused herself with a smile and a salute before heading to the loo for some privacy.

In the other universe, the co-pilot was scratching his head and sweating. The Doctor had only held up the psychic paper without a word, but a stern expression that demanded his attention. She figured it was time to stir things up on the plane.

"Ah, you're from the Chinese government on an unannounced safety inspection." said the copilot, tensing up around the Doctor.

"That I am, and I am thoroughly disturbed by your blatant disregard for protocol. You ought to be ashamed; Letting a child at the controls? How irresponsible-" The Doctor said.

“But the autopilot was on! We were never in any danger.” said the Copilot, a look of desperation in his eyes as he searched for an answer

“Doctor, maybe you ought not to dress them down too much.No harm, no foul as they say.” said Patty with a conciliatory tone.

But the Doctor was having none of it. “And another thing-” The Doctor started before the plane suddenly took a nose dive in both universes.

Both the Doctor and Patty looked back at the chair and found the relief pilot’s son sitting in the chair in their universes, steering the plane like her sister had done but more violently with his play. He had climbed in while the two of them were distracted by the Doctor dressing down the co-pilot.

“I don’t think that’s turbulence this time.” said Patty. Good old Patty, riding the line between sarcasm and innocence that was indistinguishable. The two of them violently yanked the child from the chair in their respective universes and sat down again, this time holding onto the stick and attempting to level off the plane without causing the plane to stall.

With the help of the co-pilot the plane was leveled off.

“Patty, sonic the contro-.” said the Doctor before a big moon suddenly blocked her entire forward vision for a second. “Ah, right. Sorry” said the Doctor.

“Doctor, if you have another idea I’m open to suggestions. Particularly of the not dying variety.” said Patty, frustrated. Like a proud parent, The Doctor noted that she was rubbing off on Patty: she never would have used sarcasm as a coping mechanism in the face of certain death pre-travels. It took a second before she realized the content of it.

The Doctor froze, absorbing the reality of Patty’s off handed remark and the weight of mortality washing over the Doctor like a wave. In the heat of the moment the stress had finally created a crack in her boundless confidence, and now in frustration her mind was starting to jumble up and slow her down.

And in the midst of it all, the copilot was beginning to oversteer to deal with the extreme G-forces on the plane. The plane was beginning to stall out. If things continued the way they were two more planes of people, the Doctor and Patty would all be dead.

Inside her mind she saw the universe condensing around her. Celestial bodies were unnaturally drawing inwards and information was passing through her at an unmanageable rate even for The Doctor. “Fantastic!” she heard in one ear as a comet passed by. In another she heard a grandmother tell the War Doctor stories. She felt a

parallel Earth burn for it's sins as mutants ran rampant; she felt the heaviness of a button that would lobotomize the last living star whale as a moon passed through her. She saw unspeakable horror and the death of her friends and family. She saw the pillars that held up her ancestral home crumble to dust and the sight of her childhood heroes decay into madmen. She couldn't process anything or find anything useful in it all. It was all collapsing into a singularity.

"Miss. Miss I'm sorry. I didn't mean to... I'm really sorry." said the copilot's son who had grabbed the controls earlier. He was hugging her arm, shaking in fear. His head was pressed into her arm and she felt the tears from his eyes soaking into her clothes. It became personal, he was crying his life away into her arm.

Back inside her head she saw heat. Heat all around her, the universe inside her mind burning against her skin. Frustration, doubt, anger. She heard the plane engines stalling outside her head. Her vanity was going to kill people! Why couldn't she find the answer? Desperation was welling up inside her. She barely had enough time to say goodbye to Patty, maybe.

But against the chaos and confusion, she felt something more. Something fatal.

In the communicator Patty was crying. She stared into the universe, all condensed into a single, tight point as if before the Big Bang, and try as she she might to pry it open it proved too dense to try and pry apart. So she sat there, for what was an hour inside her mind, and she said goodbye to her friends. She said goodbye to Steven and Vicki, watching them enter the singularity; she said goodbye to Sarah Jane and Harry, who both hugged her and apologized for not being there. She stood up and offered a handshake to her previous self, the Draconian Doctor. That Draconian Doctor slapped her across the face and walked away. Typical.

And then she heard the whisper of two familiar voices. The sound of a young woman and the Doctor's fifth self, standing in a grassy field holding hands.

"Doctor, what is Earth like?" said Patience, smiling up at him. The Doctor ran his fingers through his blonde hair and rested his hand on the back of his neck, unsure of how to respond.

"It's hard to describe, Patience. One day I'll show you, I promise. All the flowers and cities and life in progress; we'll see them all." said The Doctor, smiling a cheeky grin.

Patience smiled wide eyed and innocent in response. It was the same smile The Doctor saw when she saw Patience next. It was the same smile that saved her time and again.

It was a smile that completely put her at ease. For a small moment, The Doctor admitted she loved that smile, a smile that radiated calm into The Doctor once more.

With the calm came a razor focus again. Inside her mind the universe exploded in a Big Bang! Knowledge flew at her and she was reading it at lightning speeds! She read planets and comets and suns and supernovas of information as readily as one feels the rays of the sun against their face on a cold winter day. Without even trying, she came up with 4 solutions that would fit herself. She carefully formed a planet with the solutions and searched each solution as a continent to see how they would work for Patty; and when she found the best one the Doctor put a TARDIS there for safe keeping.

“PATTY! RE-LEVEL THE PLANE AND LET GO! YOU’VE GOT TO LET GO OF IT!” The Doctor shouted. And she did that. And The Doctor did that. The autopilot took control once they let go and flight went back to normal.

And as the autopilot took control, The Doctor turned to the boy and gave him a tight embrace instinctively. They survived, both her and Patty’s plane had both survived. She began sobbing, and the boy hugged her back. It was okay. It was going to be okay.

It was okay. When they got back to the TARDIS, they scanned the original universe. A third plane of people were saved. The whole was saved by a strange tailwind that cast out the landing gear; and though there was still a crash, everyone lived.

“Just this once, eh Doctor?” asked Patty smiling as she hugged The Doctor staring at the screen and the report under it. That silly old universe was just sentimental enough to not let The Doctor’s efforts go to waste. The Time Lords would be furious.

“What are you talking about ‘Just this once?’ This.” She gestured towards the screen. “This is what I do. What I try to do. What I’ll always do: my best.” said The Doctor smiling and turning around. She hugged Patty back and smiled.

Behind them, you raise your hand to finally ask your question. The Doctor wipes a tear from her eye and smiles, looking at you.

“Alright then, what is it you wanted to ask?” says The Doctor.

But the story ends there. Aww c’mon...

Stalemate

by Nacho

What if the Arabella Weir "Exile" Doctor from Big Finish's Unbound range had an adventure with David Tennant as "Old Joe"?

Author's Note: Drinking Game - Drink anytime someone drinks, recounts at time they drank/got drunk or intend to. As a warning, you might die trying to follow. Especially with 120-proof vodka.

The Doctor pulled the lever, cancelling the dematerialization yet again.

For 365 days, The Doctor input coordinates to somewhere in the universe and started up the engines, only to cancel when almost completely dematerialized and staying solidly in place.

Everyone knew the sound; it happened at the same time every day. For those around it meant something different to each person that heard it; but no one quite understood why it happened.

It was assumed The Doctor's days were predictable as could be. Sentenced to a combination house arrest, solitary confinement and locked inside The TARDIS; dematerializing would only make things worse as it would never be able to rematerialize.

Unbeknownst to the Time Lords-at-large a note was left on the console declaring the whole sentence a sham designed to create the illusion of justice.

Only 3 people in the universe knew it even existed: The Doctor and the two Time Lords that had caught them, one of which wrote the note; and each day's dematerialization cancellation caused a great deal of discomfort to them.

For the general public, the questions were astounding: Was the Doctor considering death every single day at the same time? Was it more of an annoyance point, akin to rattling metal against the bars of a jail cell? Was it simply a way to remind people they were still alive?

Nobody knew. Nobody asked. The Doctor was alone inside there forever; and all of Gallifrey believed that was justice.

The Panopticon was in a panic! For the past 2 weeks recounts had led to a stalemate in the general election, and the previous President's term had expired in the meantime. Gallifrey had no Lord President, and rumors were starting to swirl with no clear central figure to quell them.

Was the chaos an interference by the Vampires? The Daleks? Was Time Lord society just so addicted to a status quo that a change between two untested frontrunners left them indecisive?

It would have been obvious to an outsider looking in that the inefficiency of a bunch of aging beings in ceremonial robes signing documents was an ineffective governing power, not that any time lord would listen to an outsider.

It wasn't until a young scholar rushed into the room of the high council in a panic that any solution at all had presented itself: a recently signed bill that was due for veto but instead was signed into action.

The law allowed citizen prisoners to exercise their legal right to vote if they were within 1 year of their sentence. Some new council members not paying attention had signed it; and as the council looked into participants who fit that criteria one member in particular felt a lump in their throat stick in place.

For the High Council candidate, his entire being would have sunk away if it could. After all, it would have been a year since the last time Old Joe had seen The Doctor.

Any other time the Time Lords would have just let The Doctor stay in silence; or at least let them come to the natural conclusion to dematerialize from the universe and seen their way out; or would have even believed the note they had left to trick them into dematerializing. Would have... if it wasn't a leap year.

The Time Lord known to The Doctor as Old Joe had high hopes despite the nature of their last meeting. After all, The Doctor was very cordial with him despite the circumstances and in some small way he felt a sense of companionship in it. A sense of trust. It certainly helped that the other candidate had no intention of meeting with The Doctor either.

Walking with confidence toward The Doctor's TARDIS and convincing himself of enthusiasm at the reunion, he withdrew the key that kept them trapped inside and took a deep breath. There was something inelegant about campaigning door-to-door, but wasn't that exactly The Doctor's style?

Inside the TARDIS, Blur's "Tender" blasted over the custom built stereo system that echoed through every room and corridor of the pocket dimension capsule. Loose items, lost change and small fixings around the TARDIS shook and danced to the music through sheer volume. "Come on come on come on, Get through it... I'm waiting for that feeling to come...." sang the music with a grand sense of optimism.

And The Doctor danced. She smiled and lazily twirled through the halls, practicing a waltz that she never expected to realize fully to the gospel choir of the music.

Sometimes she dressed mannequins as past incarnations and projected their faces onto the front, though even with that technique a mannequin made a terrible dance partner.

It got a bit lonely around the TARDIS. Was she supposed to she supposed to live out 9 more regenerations like this? Alone? Surely it was inhumane. Then again, did Time Lords even have a capacity for humanity? She wasn't sure. Briefly she thought back to her first adventure with Humans and her near fatal attack on a primitive human.

Thinking about the way she used to think and how it represented the Time Lords sense of morality didn't really bring a grand sense of optimism. Many races had a sense of shared moral guidelines, but Time Lords were never keen on sharing without a purpose.

Nevertheless, she persisted: one day the universe was going to need some "me" she had decided to herself. There were humans and cybermen having an intergalactic war that tore holes in the cosmos and threatened the safety and sanctity of developing planets; there were terrifying creatures looking to invade and oppress others; there were Quarks about for goodness sakes!

One day they would...no, the Universe would have need for a Doctor again; and she would be there, er... here.

Some days she tried to reach out to Susan telepathically to try and have a conversation; despite the fact that nothing could escape the inside of the TARDIS. That could get fairly depressing.

Once or twice a week she even got blind drunk enough to try and hallucinate her old friends Cherry and Cheese in a stupor. They seemed to be pretty boring in her memory though, so that could get even more depressing.

Once she had even been drunk enough to have an imaginary tea party with imaginary Daleks. To be clear, The Doctor was not going crazy: the tea set was real, the Daleks were imagined because it was piss easy to picture their responses and thus were real

enough to have a realistic conversation with (in so much as one can have a realistic conversation with a Dalek), the only thing that wasn't real at all was the tea.

That was vodka.

But when she really wanted to escape loneliness for a bit, she put on the tele and popped on one of the X-Files DVDs she had swiped off Cheese. It was a fascinating, the way humans saw patterns in the oddest, most random occurrences.

It was as if finding meaning in randomness somehow provided a great comfort. "Ooops, you got your eye poked out; but that's okay because it means tomorrow will be sunny and The Clash will reunite!"

God, that sounded horrible; she thought to herself. Was that the person she was now? A year in solitude and she was cynical enough to criticize her best friends?

Four knocks rapped against the TARDIS door, unable to penetrate the incredible wall of sound that was contained within. A key entered the slot and unlocked the front door, and as the doors opened a familiar timelord peered in with a strong look of disgust.

"Aw, look at what's become of the place!" he said as he walked inside and closed the doors to the control room behind him.

Wading through bottles of vodka and drinking water; venturing around virtual mountains of pizza boxes and covering his ears to protect himself against the incredible sonic cacophony, the Time Lord managed to reach the TV first and turned off the blank static across the screen and the compact disc player attached under.

"My stars, it's like she's become unbound or something!" the Time Lord exclaimed aloud in frustration.

In the next second he felt his feet involuntarily leave the ground, not even recognizing his arm being violently dislocated and his entire body flipping and falling towards the ground. Before he could even cry out for help his entire body was lying face-first in the TARDIS floor, his arm contorted into an incredibly painful position and psychic pulses being blasted into his nerve endings.

"Venusian Aikido." The Doctor said with a smug tone. Her two arms were holding his wrist with the arm outstretched and twisted, bent behind his back. Standing to the side, she was digging her heel into his spine.

"It's great to see you again, Joe. How's the Landlord? The scarecrow robots? How's Gallifrey?" she said before contorting his arm a little more to add extra pain.

“How is the ability to actually live a life?” She said with an extra hint of frustration to her voice.

“They’re all good. I’m pretty good too. About to become President if you can believe it” he said trying to play off the pain but heavily wincing as he spoke. The Doctor applied some extra pressure to the heel pressed into his spine as a result.

“You know, I really can’t believe it. Good for you, friend.” she said smiling maniacally. Letting one hand off the arm she quickly produced the note she had found on the TARDIS console and waved it in front of his face.

“Ah, that; well we all have our little pranks we pull on each other. You changed sexes, I left a n-AAGGGHHH” he said before the Doctor really let him have it with a psychic blast to the nerve endings running through his arm.

“Pranks? Convincing someone to dematerialize themselves to live out a solitary confinement outside of space and time across multiple lifetimes? Euthanasia by TARDIS? A prank?!?” she said before pulling out the heel from her back and kicking him in the kidney with that foot.

“Here’s a prank: I bet you I kicked your kidney so hard that it’s a new color! A color you won’t like!” she said screaming in frustration.

“ALRIGHT! OKAY! YOU MADE YOUR POINT! IT WASN’T A NICE THING TO DO!” Joe said writhing in agony.

“Are you sure I have? I could do with 364 more of those. I could even regenerate you from an ‘Old Joe’ into more of a Jodie, if you like.” she said before finally letting go.

Joe writhed around in pain, finally letting loose the agony in full expression. After a few solid minutes of rolling around, he came to the very painful conclusion that his arm had popped out of the socket.

Trying to regain some sense of dignity, he looked up at her and with the calmest voice possible said “Be a dear and help me out?” while pointing at his arm.

Sighing, The Doctor walked around and got herself into position before winding up her leg and kicking his arm back into the socket with one swift shot.

Joe screamed a mighty “Thank you!” as he writhed a little more and slowly rolled onto his knees.

“So, Presidency. How goes the election? I assume that brings you here.” she said hitting the auto-clean switch on the TARDIS and all the debris getting sucked into the floor and

furniture. The Doctor was quite proud of having invented that function into her TARDIS, despite it giving her less to do.

“Hang on there, you have a cleaning switch and you let your TARDIS get this bad?” Joe said standing up and rubbing his shoulder.

“Well you can’t expect me to hit the switch every day can you? That’d be abuse.” The Doctor said walking over to an old rocking chair by the coat rack and sitting down.

“Then how long ago did you hit it the last time?” he said walking over to her.

“Well usually I hit it on ‘it’s none of your business’, but this time I was feeling a little lazy so I waited until ‘let’s finish the conversation we were having before.’” said the Doctor before producing a bottle of vodka from behind the coat rack and pouring two shots. She immediately downed the first shot and offered the second to Joe, before downing that one too when he reached for it. She then poured two more shots and actually handed one to Joe this time.

“There’s no easy way to say this,” he said before downing his shot for courage. “But I need your vote to become President. You are literally the only Time Lord left on Gallifrey that is eligible to break an improbable stalemate and decide the future of us all.”

The Doctor laughed a hearty laugh. She laughed so hard her feet left the ground and her rocking chair began to go back and forth. It was a solid minute before she regained her composure and could finally reply to that statement.

“You realize how convoluted that setup sounds, right? Some idiot would have had to sign a law into place allowing a priso-” The Doctor stopped dead, mid-sentence reading his face.

She could tell where this was going. She downed her shot in a coping attempt at the situation.

“But y-... how are you even eligible for election now? It’s so daft!” said The Doctor in astonishment.

“Well it was an accident that happened while we were being careless. Before I was a candidate. It was never supposed to happen but you get a little drunk on fermented grapes and you wear the impressive robes and suddenly you wake up in a cold sweat with terrible consequences! Honestly it’s not like I wanted it to happen but it’s mine and I have to take responsibility for it.” he said losing his composure even more.

Joe took a breath to calm himself before continuing. "Look, the law says it can only apply to Time Lords within the first year of their sentence and-" Joe said before being cut off by The Doctor.

"It's a leap year, so I'm eligible. Am I the only one eligible? That's convoluted as can be." The Doctor finished.

"As convoluted as a suicide sex change that led you to hiding out in the local year 2000 in a drunken stupor on Earth?" said Joe

"Fair." The Doctor sighed.

The Doctor went up to the console and started fiddling with the controls nervously. Machinations swirled in her brain; being used to capacity for the first time in ages. For a second, she could actually picture a hamster wheel spinning at a frantic pace with cobwebs attached to the spokes of it following in the direction like a cape behind a comic book hero flying through the sky.

Within seconds she had planned out her next course of action; before Joe had even gotten up to the console to see what she was up to.

"Commute my sentence and the vote is yours." said The Doctor with a dead serious expression.

"What? WHAT? No." said Joe, with a look of disbelief.

The Doctor's expression softened. "Worth a shot." she said shrugging.

"You're not gonna... beg or anything?" Joe said slightly surprised at the ease that he had won the argument.

"Would it make a difference?" asked The Doctor. Joe sucked in a breath.

"Probably not. Just didn't expect it to be this easy." said Joe as he exhaled.

"What to be this easy?" Asked The Doctor.

"Getting you off the pardon kick. Breaking the stalemate we just had." he said with a sigh of relief.

"Oh no, Joe. I've just been stalling while I silently flicked a few knobs and switches on the console." She said turning away from him to find the dematerialization lever.

She had the coordinates input, the doors locked and the engines set. Plan B in motion.

“Release the TARDIS.” she commanded.

“No. Stop being daft.” Joe said with his brow furrowing.

The Doctor pulled the Dematerialization Lever.

“Relax, we’re just going on a field trip. I want to give you a real defense for my case, against my sentence.” she said as the central pillar slowly began to warm and budge.

“What, now?” he said frozen in indecision.

“Yes, now. Release the Rematerialization Circuit before we get trapped forever.” she said as the TARDIS engines were coming to life.

Joe’s face was a long stare of horror, fury and curiosity. It would not be the last time he would have this look on today.

Outside there was an astonished crowd of onlookers gathering. Two de-materializations in one day had been unheard of. The crowd was in complete disbelief as the box disappeared altogether: for many it was the end of an era, The Doctor was Dead.

It was on the planet Skaro that the trial truly began. They say Joe listened calmly as The Doctor retold the events that had happened in her first visit here, lifetimes ago. If that last line sounded familiar that’s very weird because that is a completely original line for this story and anywhere you might have heard that is non-canon to this story.

Back then he had saved the lives of countless people; prevented genocide by monsters; showed compassion and grace where there was none and created a future of hope for the people there.

Locally, it was only months later and the Doctor hoped to show the good that visit had done for the planet. Maybe with a little context of the changes the Doctor could bring the Time Lords would understand why the universe needed The Doctor.

Stepping outside with Joe into the city The Doctor and Joe looked out across a vast expanse lit by a twin sunset from a long metal catwalk, The Doctor’s face beaming with hope. Joe’s was a different, more complex look. Confused, he tapped on her shoulder and looked at her, wondering just exactly what was going on.

“Uhh, where is everyone?” He said gesturing around.

The Doctor’s eyes widened. There wasn’t a single movement in the city. There wasn’t a single Dalek anywhere, immobilized or otherwise. There wasn’t anyone, besides them. The city was dead silent besides the wind rushing between the buildings around them.

“No...NO! NO!” she said sprinting off.

“Just perfect” Joe said in a drawn out, defeated tone. He sighed as he sprinted off in pursuit. Either she was crazy, which was the most likely option, or something terrifying was happening to drain an entire planet of sentient beings.

Inside the security office Joe found The Doctor using her sonic screwdriver to scroll through 4 different cameras of footage partitioned off on a screen divided into quarters.

“Wait. Why do Daleks have split screens? They could have data fed into their eyestalks directly!” Asked Joe with with mild annoyance in his voice.

Without looking away, The Doctor answered, “They didn’t. The Thals controlled this room last.”

“But then how in the hell did that race of primitives program a split screen into the Dalek technology?!?” Joe said, more complaining than questioning now.

“They didn’t. I did.” she said, now cycling all the cameras on fast forward. Joe couldn’t even keep up with one of them, nevermind four.

“But you interfered and gave them advanced capabilities!” Joe said with his hand on his head in disbelief.

The four screens paused and the doctor turned her head, with an annoyed look on her face.

“No you idiot, I just did this.” She said

“You hacked Dalek technology in seconds to program in a sp-” Joe started before The Doctor put a hand over his mouth.

“Yes. Now observe.” she said as each camera flickered between 2 frames. In the first, all four screens were filled with either Thals or immobile Daleks. In the next every camera shot was as empty as it was when they found it.

It took another 2 cycles between the frames for Joe to vocalize the contradiction in the most eloquent way possible.

“They... They just... I mean, that’s impossible! There’s no w-” Joe said before taking a deep breath to collect his thoughts and finding the most eloquent way possible to express them.

“What? WHAT?!? WHAAT?” He said. Ah, the eloquence of David Tennant.

The Doctor put both of her hands on his cheeks and looked into his eyes to calm his down.

“Stop doing that. Seriously, do you ever stop doing that?” She said with a concerned tone. Joe’s face softened and switched on a dime.

“Well, no. Lots of people find it to be an endearing character trait.” Joe said with a smug look on his face.

“Lots of people sound positively ridiculous.” she said before looking to the left, as if into a hard camera.

Heading back to the TARDIS, the two of them walked silently in disbelief of the empty planet around them. Suddenly the universe seemed more lonely; and a bit more scary knowing a mystery like an empty planet could exist; a mystery capable of snatching up an entire planet’s population without a trace.

The golden-orange sky no longer looked like the sunset of her sentence; instead it looked like the far off fires of hell burning the invisible lost souls from around them.

The Doctor produced a small drinking flask from her pocket. It had been something she had been saving for the occasion of her escape; or possibly her dematerialization from the universe to drink herself into a regeneration.

Flipping the top open, she took a heaving gulp of straight 120-proof vodka before silently putting offering it to Joe. As he reached for the flask she pulled it back and took a quick small sip before offering it for real. Joe took it without a word.

“I have to do something about this.” The Doctor said with a steel eyed gaze a thousand yards wide and a powerful determination in her voice. Joe attempted to swallow what was clearly too strong a drink for him before talking, coughing as he spoke.

“Like hell you do. You have to get back to your sentence and I have to inform the CIA about this.” Joe said looking forward, not even making eye contact. In an awkward pause he passed the drink back and The Doctor took another sip.

“This planet was one of my first interferences. I gave those people a life free from The Daleks! I made a difference here and it’s my responsibility to straighten it out.” said The Doctor as they both approached the TARDIS door.

“Doctor, you’re a sentenced inmate who kidnapped me; alone in the universe with no clues and no backup; trying to do a job that the most advanced civilization in the universe has the most technologically capable force ever known that could set this in

right in the space of time between your two heartbeats. There is no logical reason this shouldn't be their job to set right." said Joe looking at her in the eye.

The Doctor sighed and resigned herself: Joe was right. Whatever she felt morally, she wasn't some Paragon of Justice to the Time Lords. She had given up that right when she refused to fight her sentence. She had given up that right when she first ran away from her trial. Still, something was nagging her heartstrings.

"At least let me go with you to the CIA and help you explain the situation." said The Doctor.

"You understand you're currently a fugitive from justice asking to walk into the hands of the law..-" started Joe.

"-Of the stuffiest, most obscene society the Universe has ever known with the greatest propensity for utter boredom and cosmic-temporal Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. Yes, I understand that." The Doctor finished before turning towards the sunset one last time. Perhaps this would be her last one; it was quite a stunning sight to go out on at least. As she stared out on the horizon, she downed the rest of the flask.

"Pfft. The Time Lords. Keepers of the universal fallacy of "manifest ownership": they think they own everything, but have decided to keep it exactly where it is like jealous infants. Well, it's going to do the universe some good for once. No Joe, I don't care what happens to me; but the Thals... a war that lasted ages, only to be made primitives under brutal oppression and what happens when they get a glimmer of life again, of progress? Taken away and forgotten by something incredible. There were good people the first time I came here. There were good people that deserve better. So I'm going to make sure they get better. But...-" She paused for a second, weighing the gravity of her next words.

"I.. I don't want to go." said The Doctor looking Joe in the eye like she had said something he would understand. Her eyes looked down, the weight of the decision in them.

"Let's go." she said in the last moment, realizing those were ham-fisted last words.

The relatively short trip had turned out to be quite long for The Doctor and Joe. At first Joe tried to send out a few consolation remarks during the flight. But The Doctor was determined to face her justice with a sense of poise and rationality despite her dancing panic inside her and instead keep silent and focused. It turns out Vodka also made

interdimensional time and space driving as difficult as automobile driving as well, and it seemed to be a miracle she had the craft steady between her nerves and intoxication.

Even as the TARDIS materialized inside the main hub of the CIA, The Doctor has no idea what to expect. Would she be killed on sight? Would she be allowed to just dematerialize into oblivion now? Was she about to crash the whole craft and regenerate in some daft way?

She steeled her nerves. This was it. This was the music. She took a deep breath, flung open the doors with Joe beside her and gasped as she opened the TARDIS doors.

Nobody was in the entire Celestial Intervention Agency. Not a single solitary presence existed outside the TARDIS at that moment.

Joe didn't understand.

The Doctor didn't understand.

The Doctor ran back to her TARDIS console and began scanning the CIA for life. She scanned far, she scanned thoroughly and she scanned the timestream for the area as well. Time Lords, animals, not even bacteria ever existed at any point in the timeline where they were. Despite the building existing and the technology running, no one had ever been there according to her TARDIS scan of the area timeline. The area was a complete paradox that threatened the TARDIS's existence if they didn't leave immediately.

"Joe we've got to do something!" she said grabbing Joe by the arm and pulling him from the doorway, snapping her fingers to shut the door behind her. As the slam of the doors audibly sounded, the cloister bell rang right after as if it was the next beat in a steady, frantic rhythm.

Joe was frozen in disbelief at the power and magnitude of the situation. Someone had launched a direct assault on the Time Lords without a single trace or alarm, leaving the area completely devoid of sentient life.

The Doctor ran back to the console once the doors were closed and took off with the TARDIS into the vortex with a look of pure terror on her face.

"Joe! JOE! Something has to be done! Don't just stand there! Make a call to the High Council while I pilot" she said at the controls. Eventually, the bell stopped ringing as they got further away from the area and there seemed to be an audible exhale from both The Doctor and her TARDIS as they approached a safe area in the Vortex.

Joe grabbed one of her hands on the console to stop her movements and calm her down, having never lifted the line and instead taking a large gulp of the vodka bottle from behind the coat rack that he had swiped on the way by. He paused once he had her attention, sighing and looking to the side unable to fully articulate what he needed to say immediately.

“Doctor...” he began. “Gallifrey has no President or CIA. We have neither the capability to make decisions nor the power to carry them out.”

He looked her in the eyes, and in The Doctor’s eyes he could see what words were about to come from him before he even said them.

“Doctor I’m so, so sorry but there’s nothing to be done to help the Thals while the Time Lords are so bureaucratically limited and so crippled by ‘whatever’ this is.” Joe said, scared.

The Doctor slapped Joe. He dropped the vodka bottle to the ground and it shattered.

“So you just give up? You know, I’m almost ashamed you caught me now. I thought you were different! I thought you were resourceful and witty and had ideas! Instead you’re in some useless... immovable object! You’re not more reasonable! When faced with something that needs to be fixed, when good things could be done at your expense and it just makes sense to do you’re at a stalemate! And...” The Doctor paused, her face in an incredible epiphany.

The Doctor ran to the TARDIS personal computer section of the control panel and logged into the Gallifreyan mainframe. Hurriedly she accessed the high council database, while scanning the time out of her peripheral vision.

“What are you doing, Doctor?” Joe said, now peeking over her shoulder curiously as she scrambled about like a mad woman.

“Joe, I am going to break the stalemate. You’re going to become The President. Now please let me concentrate before I run out of time.” she said without turning away or blinking.

“Well it’d go a lot faster if you updated your web browser every once in awhile. How do you even get Internet Explorer 4 on a TARDIS computer?” Asked Joe in grotesque mixture of condescension and astonishment.

“What was that? Was that you saying you’d rather NOT be President?” The Doctor asked with annoyance in her voice while still concentrating on the screen.

“No... Nothing. I said nothing.” He said looking away. Biting the hand that feeds probably wasn’t the thing to do when getting what you want. No one likes an ungraceful winner.

It wasn’t until after The Doctor cast her vote and Joe gave her a celebratory hug that Joe caught the enormity of the situation, in mid-embrace.

“It’s my problem now.” He said, his eyes widening.

“Yes it is.” The Doctor said smiling, letting go of the embrace.

“But I have no CIA; and no Time Lords have even been off Gallifrey long enough to have the experience to know how to... Oh.” He said before looking at her. He sighed, resigning himself the way she had before during sentencing.

“So that’s it then? No more stalemate then? I suppose my only move left is...” he said looking at her. The inflection was shockingly familiar.

“Checkmate.” She said.

A few hours later the TARDIS was drifting in a slow spin through the Milky Way Galaxy, somewhere between the Moon and Mars. The Doctor read the TARDIS screen while standing at the Console with a big smile. A commuted sentence under community service provided she could find the cause of the disappearances.

She turned from the console and stared out the door, comets whizzing by and pure star light bursting through the doorway like an explosion of life. The TARDIS was surrounded by stars and planets and comets and life again and it was beautiful. Breathing in a sigh with a tear running down her cheek, she snapped her fingers.

The music unpaused behind her, a needle beginning to read down the new vinyl disc, Falling by Graham Coxon, the guitarist from Blur. The Doctor smiled while dancing a Waltz she would be able to realize soon enough in the halls of The TARDIS.

Somehow it was a song she already knew, despite it being a new record given to her by Joe. His parting words were about the song in question, saying “It’s a bit on the nose; but it fits you. Who you are.”

As the song came to a close, she sang the last few lines. There was a nostalgia to the melody; and like The Doctor’s life ahead it was rejuvenated and renewed. A regeneration unnecessary; it was time for the Universe to meet her as The Doctor.

“And the Earth's a distant point among the stars... how will we ever find just where we are” she sang and flipped a switch, closing the door. It was time to be The Doctor. And for a last shot of vodka.

Inside the contents of a black hole, an entire universe of anti-matter was populated. Thals, Daleks, Time Lords and architecture were being built up at a rapid pace. The most incredible displays in the universe were just appearing at will to the master... the God of it all.

But it wasn't enough. It wouldn't, couldn't be enough. He had assumed that someone in the CIA would have the mental capacity to carry his consciousness and allow him to escape; but it turns out the CIA were as weak willed as any regular Time Lord.

And so were the Thals. And so were the Daleks. A mind transfer burned their brains, his mind too great for their wills to accept, his power and cunning too grand to comprehend. Different races shackled to the walls were their weakened shells, little more than living vegetables now and equal in their defeat. They populated their cities as lobotomized shells, shuffling and living with no higher brain function at all; cities inhabited by the zombies left in the God's wake.

It was all a reminder that his ambition was too great for lesser beings devoted to smaller ideals. No, he needed a mind with grand design, someone with cunning and ingenuity. Someone who could truly accomplish something; otherwise the universe would never feel the touch of his genius again.

So he could not stop absorbing great chunks and life forms throughout the universe into his own. Not until that God escaped back to claim his throne. Not until he could take his place among immortals and end his exile. Not until the stalemate of his existence led to his victory.

Omega walked out onto the balcony of his grand palace, surveying the universe he ruled as a god. After an instant, raised his arms out and gestured towards the sky with his hands in fists, crying out in frustration with an over-the-top English theatre accent. “I WILL HAVE MY REVENGE ON THE UNIVERSE! I AM OMEGAAAA!”

A bolt of antimatter lightning flashed and struck out in the distance behind him as if from nowhere, his sheer will causing it for dramatic effect.

THE EXILE DOCTOR WILL RETURN IN THE THREE(ish) DOCTORS REDUX.

The Time Trap

by Nacho

What if the Shalka Doctor faced off against The Kin, from Neil Gaiman's Eleventh Doctor novella 'Nothing O'Clock'?

"You see? That's done it! We're finally back in the right universe! Right timeline, right place and right universal makeup" said The Doctor proudly with a smile as he took some readings from the TARDIS readout screen and jotted them down in a small notebook full calculations and shorthand equations.

"Yeah, honestly I can almost feel it. It feels right, Doctor. Which is a lot more than I can say for some of your other tries." Alison said smiling as she walked towards the TARDIS doors.

"Well I don't feel anything at all." said The Master in a deadpan sort of sarcasm.

"What, you mean calculators don't feel any natural phenomenons of the makeup of a universe? Color me shocked." said The Doctor looking over with a sarcastic look to match.

For a year or so locally, The Doctor had been trying to find the way back to their original universe after the point of Divergence. Said divergence was a moment when he had saved a previous incarnation from a time virus that would have taken over his body eventually; which unfortunately ripped The Doctor from the current timeline and ensured that he had never existed, placing his entire timeline in an alternate universe to resolve the paradox.

There his battles against The Shalka, the ascension of the Time Lords, even his previous life's death at the hands of an exploding Zeppelin was still very much a reality. Alison and The Master were free to protect that universe any way they saw fit with no consequence to any other universe.

It was perhaps the lack of consequence that bothered him the most. The feeling of a different universe was a slight, unsettling nausea in the pit of his stomach; but the knowledge that his adventures had less bearing as a whole was a strain on his ego no matter how many billions he saved.

Every attempt to console him led to the same argument, "It was MY universe, and I want to see it. I want to see what's become of it! I want to make sure it's in the right

hands.” he would say, which usually forced an eye roll from The Master after the second or fourth time hearing it.

So they had attempted to reach out and find their way home, just to have a peek. Maybe see what The Doctor had become in that timeline, maybe even step in if there was no Doctor. Alison even had come along. It had to be more exciting than going back to bartending in a sleepy town full of gossip.

However, The TARDIS was very uneasy about crossing universes. Like trying to steer a frigate through the air, it had no sense of control when navigating the pores between universes, and as such led them to any number of different timelines.

One had led them to a timeline where a handful of infamous internet message board posters were a council of Time Lords. Everything was thoroughly entertaining despite the relative lack of brevity and the difficulty he had as an outsider in figuring out their jokes. Another was an entire universe where The Doctor never existed. In that universe a man named John Smith and his wife were fighting the remnants of the rise of the Cybermen, this time created by an earth company known as Cybus, among free floating Zeppelins. There was something puzzling about John Smith and his wife; something that almost smelled or tasted right on his senses, but he could not put his finger on exactly what it was. That adventure had gotten him so close that he took the black box from a Void ship to get him back there if he ever lost his way.

His latest adventure had even led him closer, to a universe he had visited in his third incarnation. Earth was a fireball there, covered by feral men and the remnants of a fascist government. He could not bear to look for clues there where the painful memories of his time there still haunted him upon reminder. It took The Master a moment to remember where they were before remembering the very painful look he had seen into The Doctor’s mind when the memory was still fresh; and it had led to enough sympathy to cover up his usual cynicism and sarcasm for a few moments.

Finally being in this universe was a huge relief. He could go anywhere, see anything he wanted to see. He could go meet his scarf wearing fourth incarnation if he wanted; he could go and give his sixth incarnation a bicycle helmet if he was feeling adventurous. He could even have adventures of his own throughout space and time that would mean something again; completely independent of the other Doctor and wherever the universe took him.

“There’s just a little hitch on your enthusiasm, Doc.” said Alison as she looked at the readout screen.

“Nonsense, what could possibly sp-Oh.” he said as he looked at the read out screen.

He ran to the door frantically, trading his normally authoritative stride for something a little more hectic. As he got close he snapped his fingers and the doors flung open before him, revealing a black void with a single source of light in the distance. The Doctor sighed and looked out. “Right place, wrong time.”

“A bullseye as always, then?” quipped The Master.

They were in a void before the Big Bang; a complete lack of time around them with nothing they knew existing yet; all of the known universe being compressed down to the single solitary point in front of them.

“It’s not as if we’re somewhere completely off the target then. We have a machine that can navigate space and ‘time’. It’s a short hop forward to see what’s become of the old apartment.” said The Doctor.

“So you say, but ‘when’ will we go?” asked Alison in a sort of deadpan sarcasm.

“2005.” said The Doctor immediately. He had clearly been thinking about that answer.

“You want to see the immediate changes in the universe.” Alison said raising her eyebrow.

“Well, yes. Why else do you think we’re here?” he said looking out across the cosmos to the single beacon, like a pulsating endpoint to his long journey now finally in sight. It was possibly the most beautiful thing The Doctor had seen in a long time.

“Let’s get a move-on then! Go on Doctor, ask me what time it is!” said Alison with an abundance of enthusiasm.

“Oh alright, what time is it?” The Doctor asked smiling and matching her enthusiasm.

“Time to realize you have an intruder” said Alison in a deeper, more menacing voice.

“Huh? What are you going on a- Oh. OH! I see.” said The Doctor as he turned around and saw a tall, vaguely humanoid figure with a cheap paper cutout of Alison’s face stapled to it’s forehead. The Doctor had to concentrate hard on the face to see through the disguise, as the intruder had a powerful perception filter that actively tried to calm his mind.

“You know, that really is cheap looking. Doesn’t even look 100% right, the face is too old. Honestly it looks more like Queen Elizabeth the 10th” he said smugly.

“Well the voice sounds right, doesn’t it Doctor?” said ‘Alison’.

“It sounds a bit older too, if we’re being honest.” said The Doctor. He closed the door behind himself and faced the monster.

“Now who are you and what are you doing here? And not just “here” as in my TARDIS, but in this ti- well lack-of-time period.” asked the Doctor with a sort of intensity to his overall demeanor.

“You mean you don’t know? Ha! The Doctor in The TARDIS doesn’t know! *‘Doesn’t Know! Doesn’t Know!’* This might be all too easy.” It said with a sing-song inflection.

“Ha, you might think so but in this case there is only one of you and three of us!” said The Doctor smugly.

“Oh yeah? Then where’d they go mate?” asked the monster with Alison’s voice again, taunting The Doctor again. The Doctor looked away from the Monster for the first time since it had revealed itself, and saw no one else was standing at the TARDIS console. The Doctor’s poker face dropped.

“Oh shit.” Alison said rising up from the floor with a groan to her knees. Her balance was extremely off from... wait what had just happened? She looked around and found herself in her own room inside the TARDIS. Last she could remember she was at the console. Or was it a dream?

“Alison, are you alright? I heard you fall and came to check on you.” said The Doctor as he helped her to her feet.

“Yeah, I just... wait do you know what happened? I don’t even know how I ended up on the floor here.” said Alison as she looked at the Doctor. In her head she was still replaying the events, obsessing slightly; looking for a clue among the wreckage.

“We got back into the right universe. We must have hit some dimensional turbulence as we popped through the skin and made our way here; and I heard you fall out of bed when it happened. Lucky you.” he said smiling and excited.

It was a bit odd, seeing the Doctor excited. Maybe not entirely uncharacteristic as things had broken through his stoic facade before; but this level of enthusiasm was strange to Alison.

“You alright, mate? You seem a bit more... I dunno, anxious? Chipper?” Alison asked.

"Of course I'm alright! We're finally here! Go on, ask me what time it is!" said The Doctor.

"Right... where have we landed then?" asked Alison smiling, the enthusiasm rubbing off on her a bit.

"No... no. No No...NO! Ask me what 'TIME' it is." said The Doctor, his voice crescendoing in frustration.

"Fine fine... what time is it?" asked Alison, getting weirded out by the odd polarity of The Doctor's emotions.

"Time for you to go back to sleep." said The Master's voice from behind her.

Allison turned around, shocked when she looked and saw a well dressed figure with white hair behind her.

"But wait, you're not The Master! You're that Professor Yana fellow fro-" Allison started before getting knocked out by the Doctor behind her.

"Professor Yana? Someone ought to tell her who he actually is." said the monster impersonating The Master.

"And ruin the impressive reveal? Nah, it's basically the only thing someone as dull as The Master has going for him." said the monster impersonating the Doctor.

"As 'what' as The Master?" asked a figure draped in a shadow and dressed in all black at the threshold to Alison's room.

"The Master!" both monsters exclaimed in a panic at once. The two of them looked towards the figure as it revealed itself into the light.

"Uncanny, your features couldn't be any more wrong." said The Master looking at his would-be impersonator.

"Well the voice sounds right, doesn't it Master?" said the monster impersonating The Master.

"And I suppose you want some kind of award for sounding like the most recognizable villain The Doctor has ever known?" snarked The Master.

"But he sounds nothing like The Daleks." said the monster impersonating The Doctor.

If looks could kill, The Master would have murdered the monsters right there on the spot. He squinted, clearly annoyed; and uncharacteristically almost said “Now listen here you little shit.” before regaining his composure and keeping that thought to himself.

“Ask us what time it is. It’ll be fun.” both the monsters requested in a monotone unison.

“Fine fine. What... are you creatures?” The Master asked with a cheeky smirk on his face.

“No NO NO NO NO! YOU MUST ASK WHAT IS TIME IT IS!” both of them said in unison, stomping with their ‘no’s for emphasis and throwing a temper tantrum like a child.

“Do you honestly believe that will work on me? You clearly know that I am The Master, and if you know who I am then you know it’s a brazen miracle that I haven’t murdered you both already. And if I have to ask my question again, it will be with my bare hands while shushing your agonized, strangling bodies before I rip those ridiculous masks stapled to your faces. Now of the speech I just gave you, what exactly makes you believe that I’m going to give you what you want?” said The Master smirking almost to the point of laughing. He fidgeted with his sleeves, rolling up his attire to his elbows. In response the monsters lifted the masks stapled to their foreheads, prompting an eyebrow raise from The Master.

“So I ask again, who are you and what exactly do you want?” asked The Doctor in the control room, still by the door to the outside.

“Think hard, time lord. Think on the lullabies and stories you heard as a child.” it said to him, holding a smug smirk with Alison’s face. The Doctor had to concentrate hard to see through it as a paper cut out, and it was draining brain power away from thinking too hard about obscure stories from the past.

“Well... you obviously aren’t Zagreus or the Shakri. You’d have just blown up the ship or killed me if you were powerful enough to be The Hybrid...” said The Doctor, wondering aloud so as not to break his own concentration.

“YOU are the hybrid, Doctor. Everyone knows this. It’s why you spend so much time on Earth despite being a high-born Gallifreyan.” said the Monster.

“What?!? You think “I’m” the hy- no wait, you’re confusing the issue: we’re not here to discuss who the hybrid is. We can do that later; at the other ‘end’ of the universe.” said The Doctor, aggravated by the diversion.

“Fine, continue with your deduction.” said The Monster, confused as to how the conversation got diverted to such a strange and obscure idea as well.

“And since I just have a sneaking suspicion you’re not the Toclafane and this definitely isn’t a dream, then you must be... Ah, The Kin.” said The Doctor said looking seriously now at the monster beside his TARDIS console.

“Correct.” said The Kin, smiling before taking off the mask. Beneath was a grotesque display casually masquerading as a face in a concave cavity in the head. Inside was a long, swirling bare-intestines looking mass that sort of squirmed and crawled and wriggled into itself and between it’s own layers looking for space like the universe’s most terrifying natural game of snake, a strange gelatinous lubrication being excreted and keeping things shiny to the light. It seemed to have no beginning and no end point.

“Yes, well that’s... AHM. But what about my other question? What are you doing here? The Time Lords put you in an eternal stasis outside of temporal phase with the universe. You should have never been able to escape.” he asked, struggling to regain his stoic composure.

“Oh, but you put me here. Or at least...” The Kin paused and put on a mask that resembled a young Prince Phillip. “The you of this universe did.” it said said taunting him. The voice the mask gave the kin sounded young and slightly manic; but authoritative enough. Something was definitely off about the face.

Why did he do that? What possible reason could he have had to use the beginning of the universe in such away. The Doctor frantically scanned his thoughts while keeping an outward facade of confidence. Now with his mind not concentrating so hard on seeing through The Kin’s disguises, he could come up with a proper plan and figure out it’s motiv-

“THE KIN! Yes! The Kin who clones itself by asking people what the time is! The Kin who use cheap disguises and want to create a sort of quantum entropy involving itself! Incredible! But... OH! A TIME TRAP! You must be here, in the universe before time because this was literally the one place you could be without causing any damage! How long have you even been here waiting before I just showed up like a big old escape boat and let you crawl in?” remarked The Doctor in a long winded summary that spoiled a previous story.

“How long have I been here? In a universe before time and no way to mark its passage? About 5 minutes.” The Kin said in a deadpan manner. The Doctor ignored that comment.

“But why here? Why did he place you here and basically imprison you? You’re the only one of your kind. Surely he had some sympathy.” said The Doctor.

“Not the only one, I think.” said The Master, walking into the control room from one of the long twin spiral staircases accompanied by 2 more of The Kin, their faces covered by different cutouts of The Brigadier’s daughter, Kate Stewart. Both were subtly different from one another, the biggest difference being one had short hair and one had long hair that went past the shoulders. The Doctor had no idea if one mask was more accurate than the other.

“Is this the part where you betray me for some evil scheme for a monster that will help you rule the universe?” asked the Doctor sarcastically.

“But of course Doctor, they don’t call me The Master because of how well I follow other people’s orders, now do they? That’d be a tad redundant.” said The Master, a glint of mischief in his eye. As he led his accomplices and gestured widely across the TARDIS as if he owned it.

“It’s a title, you twit. You couldn’t be the master of a birthday party.” said The Doctor before finally charging the console in a sprint. Upon taking a few steps forward The Doctor fell through the floor and landed face first after a 7 foot drop on the TARDIS floor exactly where he was standing before by the door. The Doctor brushed himself off from the dust on the floor as the Master chuckled at the predicament.

“That was... never mind.” The Doctor said before charging again and falling on his face yet again. He groaned in pain and frustration when he noticed his surroundings had reset again.

“Ah, yes I see. The Kin. I had forgotten they could do that in their story.” he said getting up a second time. He got up and tried one last time, leaping into the air to avoid where he had fallen before only to hit a wall out of nowhere face first. That wall ended up being the floor where he kept getting reset. The Master was outright laughing now, the Doctor just continued to lay there.

“My dear Doctor, if I had known this was the way to cause you so much frustration I would have come here lifetimes ago.” The Master said as he approached the Console.

“But why? Why did he leave you here? I don’t understand, you seem relatively harmless and there must have been some other w- unless you aren’t harmless...” The Doctor said lying on his back as his eyes widened.

“Correct, Doctor. It seems they killed a child, a girl. At least, that’s what they were telling me.” said The Master. The Doctor’s eyes bulged with rage as he got up from the floor. He had no sympathy for unrepentant murderers.

“Calm down Doctor, now is not the time for fear. That comes later.” said The Kin in a gloating fashion.

“I see. It appears I’ve come to the same conclusion my counterpart did then. Gentlemen, I think our time here is soon coming to a close; and with it your last grasps of freedom and companionship. I would say it has been an honor, but you lack any sense of it. I offer you one condition: leave my ship now of your own accord and you leave unharmed.” said The Doctor as he pulled out his sonic screwdriver.

“And what could you do to us? We are The Kin, we have a pilot and all of Time and Space is at our disposal. We will escape this hellish prison and take back the universe you Time Lords stole from Me.” said The Kin. The Master sighed. He had worked with so much more original, more expressive genocidal monsters in his day.

“And what have they promised you?” he said looking at The Master.

“I get to keep the TARDIS. I could take over whatever universe I wish.” The Master said plainly.

“Not aiming very high with this plan are you.” taunted The Doctor.

“No, but how imaginative can one get with fake evil ambitions. After all if you’re a recovering Onanist it’s hard to-” said The Master before getting cut off.

“I’m sorry, fake evil wha-” asked The Kin.

“That’s our cue, buddy.” said The Doctor as he snapped his fingers. Instantly a record dropped and a needle read the record, playing “I Hope I Get It” from A Chorus Line. The music blasted across the console room at an incredible volume, forcing The Kin instinctively to cover it’s ears, unprepared for the sheer volume that The Doctor’s record player produced. With their hands over their ears The Doctor snapped his fingers opening the TARDIS doors and The Master pulled a lever forcibly ejecting The Kin from the TARDIS. With their hands covering their ears they were effortlessly pulled from the ship and launched into the space outside the TARDIS. As soon as he did, The Doctor closed and locked the doors behind him. Less than a second afterward he could hear The Kin banging on the door, demanding to be let back in and attached to The TARDIS.

“Give up Doctor! No matter where you go, The Kin will travel with you to escape!” it said yelling at the door. Their cries were drowned out by the entry of the vocals to the song.

The Doctor cracked a wild smile. Villains who referred to themselves in the third person had become somewhat of a novelty in his adventures throughout the dimensions. He was going to have to give them a proper 'The Doctor' defeat for that.

"I say we just fly through the cosmic singularity and jump start the beginning of the universe. Make the "big" "bang", so to speak. The Kin would just burn up harmlessly." said The Master with a mischievous look in his eyes.

"And ruin my paint job? When did that come on the table?" The Doctor said as he ran over to the console and started rummaging around under it.

"You seem to have a better idea then." said The Master, rolling his eyes.

"Yep." said The Doctor as he turned on the torch in his sonic screwdriver.

"Something you no doubt think is incredibly clever and are already patting yourself on the back over?" asked The Master, deadpan and turning away from the console.

"Yep." said The Doctor as he pulled out the black box he had gotten from the Void ship in John Smith's universe.

"And I suppose you have no intention of telling me a word of it." The Master said as he began to traverse the spiral stairs.

"Not a syllable." said The Doctor as he plugged the black box into the console.

"I'll go check on Alison." said The Master as he climbed, leaving The Doctor to his triumphant victory as per usual. The Doctor briefly remembered the circumstances of him acquiring the black box.

"That Void ship has practically been through Doomsday. To be honest, it'll probably give up enough coordinates for a little bit of navigation if you were jumping between universes; but I don't think it would last very long or get you where you want to be. Too much damage, too much corruption." had said John Smith as The Doctor took the black box away.

Fidgeting and dancing around the TARDIS console, he angled the trajectory and launched the ship through space at just the right speed to break through the Void using the coordinates from the black box. As soon as the TARDIS busted through and rematerialized in another universe, he snapped his fingers opening the door. Under a second later, The Kin was in the doorway, a gloating look on Prince Phillip's face.

“Doctor, you’ve let us into a whole new universe. A universe without Time Lords. Thank you. We will rule and corrupt as we please.” said The Kin before he realized The Doctor had a smile on his face.

“I THINK NOT!” said The Doctor as he activated his Sonic Screwdriver, causing the breach he had just opened up in the skin of the universe to open up and reverse flow.

“Back to the flypaper you pest!” The Doctor shouted as The Kin was ripped from the doorway and thrown out through the breach back into the regular universe before time existed again. The pull also began to affect The Doctor as well, though The Doctor was prepared for it and struggled, throwing the capsule to-and-fro in an attempt to get out of the Void’s pull. The Void material covering the ship would eventually end up being too strong a magnet for the reversed polarity. With all his universe jumping the TARDIS was covered in many different void materials and as a result was tossed about through different universes like a frigate in a storm. The Doctor piloted for dear life, attempting to survive the intense rocking and maneuver his way through without hitting his head on the TARDIS console. Again. Eventually he managed to pull just far enough away from the constant pull of many different universes to get himself stable inside a new universe he hadn’t been to before.

A few minutes later The Master and Alison came down the stairs with the Doctor leaning against the console excited, looking into the readout screen.

“Come come come!” he shouted as he waved them closer. As they came closer they saw he was looking at a wide universe with stars being actively sucked into a black hole.

“It can’t be...” said The Master, his jaw wide open.

“Oh but it is!” The Doctor said excited.

“It is... what?” said Alison, confused.

“It’s the Three Doctors!” said The Doctor.

“The What Doctors?” asked Allison.

“An event of temporal self-importance where The Doctor met with himself...and himself to take on one of Gallifrey’s greatest heroes. Naturally they spent the entire time arguing and took forever to get even that done.” said The Master, rolling his eyes.

“And I’ve got to see it! I’ve got to see how this universe does it!” said The Doctor, wide grinning.

“What about getting back to the other universe? To ‘our’ universe?” asked Alison, impatient.

“That universe has a Doctor for now. It can wait a few minutes. This...this is something truly exciting!” he said pulling the lever to dematerialize. As the TARDIS engines revved up and the doors closed, a single sound was still prominent and lingering to anyone within earshot where the TARDIS was dematerializing, a line from the song that would echo through the cosmos. “I really need this job. Please God I need this job. I’ve got to have this job!” sang Donna Drake as Tricia on the recording.

THE SHALKA DOCTOR WILL RETURN IN THE THREE(ISH) DOCTORS REDUX.

The Three(ish) Doctors Redux

by Nacho

What if the Exile Doctor, Shalka Doctor, and Nacho Doctor faced Omega?

“Monsters! Aliens! Fly you fools!” screamed The Doctor as she ran down the narrow hallway, gunshots firing behind her as UNIT soldiers ran and shot backwards aimlessly; their wild spray of bullets turning the hall into a swiss cheese-like pattern. Behind them was a black, slowly advancing mass that let off a strange, RGB glimmer in its outline. It gleefully absorbed any bullets or attacks without any sort of indication of effect, much like firing into a void.

Eventually The Doctor worked up the nerve and decided that their gunfire was slowing their own progress more than having any effect on the abomination chasing them and grabbed them by their shirt collars from behind, breaking into a sprint that they struggled to match pace with her.

“Just what are those things, Doctor?” shouted Mike Yates.

“Amorphous blob monsters who are physically impervious to bullets.” said The Doctor as she struggled to keep a hold on the two gentlemen at the rate she was running.

“Well that’s pretty obvious isn’t it?” said Sergeant Benton, slowly becoming out of breath at the ridiculous amount of running he was doing today.

“Just keep up, Benton! You’ll be more thankful to be alive in an hour than you will be annoyed by how out of shape you are!” said The Doctor with a sort of a gleeful taunt.

Her goal was just a short 200 meter dash straight down the corridor to her Tardis. There was something lively that she had missed to running down hallways with reckless abandon and death on her heels. For almost two years she had lived her life in this body and not once until now had she felt more alive! The air pushing through and around her, the heftiness of her companions and their weight in her iron grip, the thrill beating through her hearts was a religious experience! She was being baptized in adventure once more!

It created an intoxicating nostalgia that she might have mistaken for a runner’s high in any other incarnation. The thrill of the chase! The danger of death! The running into of another Doctor that knocked her flat on her ass! Wait, that last one wasn’t quite right.

She had ran into someone at an intersection of the hallway, not even noticing it was there among the uniform look of the walls and the speed at which she was running blending the opening together, like true tunnel vision. The impact flung Mike Yates and Sergeant Benton clear across the floor towards her TARDIS. She had physically rammed into a man in Victorian dress; black hair with white highlights and a long, high cheekboned face. If it wasn't so completely tawdry against the backdrop of a 1970s paramilitary organization headquarters, she might have even been inclined to find the dress sense attractive. She slowly got up, rubbing the impacted areas.

"Don't just dawdle there, get to your Tardis! Run!" said the man, already on his feet and running down the hall. He ran with a stern, authoritative step giving off an air of importance. Down the area where he had come from was another black, amorphous blob, almost identical. Deciding questions could wait she sprinted after the other 3, running extra hard to make up for lost distance. As the monsters intersected in the hallway they fused, creating a larger, slightly faster moving blob.

As they got close to the TARDIS The Doctor was panicking under the realization that, with monsters hot on their trails, her TARDIS key was in her boot. She slapped her forehead in frustration as she realized her error, as it would take precious time to get the key out of her boot before she they could get the door open; time they didn't have. At the very least she figured that the blob would probably take one of their group. Mentally she prepared for what she would say to Sergeant Benton when it caught Mike Yates.

"Oy, get in! The kettle's on and I don't have a ton of time to watch the door before it starts to go off!" screamed another man poking his head out of the Tardis door, ajar. As the 4 of them got close, the man flung the doors open to allow a wide view behind him of the Tardis console room. The running man ran in instinctively, the two UNIT soldiers froze in place at the doorway, only to get pushed inside by The Doctor from behind before the doors were closed and locked behind her. Instinctively the man at the doorway leaned lazily against them.

"Shields are up! We have a moment to talk." said the man in the Victorian clothes.

"Who a-" The Doctor started before being cut off.

"Holy crap, you're pale as a ghost. What are you, some kind of Vampire?" asked the man at the door, interrupting The Doctor. The man was a slightly shorter, but wide shouldered and strong frame with wild, curly black hair, a black shirt with a white vest hiding leather suspenders, a black newsboy cap and a pair of black slacks. His black dress shoes had orange laces.

"No, no I am not. And just who are you to refer to me like that?" said the man in the Victorian clothes.

"I'd like to know who you both are and how in blazes you're all involved!" said The Doctor, exasperated. There was a powerfully loud crash, the sound of power discharging in a blast just outside the TARDIS door.

"Wait, you don't know who he is?" said both men, eerily in unison.

"I don't think I know who I am at this point." said Sergeant Benton, sitting down in an old victorian rocking chair by the coat rack. An odd eyesore in a futuristic, alien space craft.

"Benton you'll find the Vodka on your left behind the coat rack. Feel free to take a drink. And to pour me one when you're ready, dear." said The Doctor as she walked over to the console and began adjusting her display settings at the console.

"Right, I'm The Doctor. From another universe. Forgive my intrusion; I just know this scenario and am a huge fan." said the man in the Victorian clothes, apparently The Doctor.

"No no no, you can't be The Doctor from another universe, 'I' am The Doctor from another universe. And I'm here because... well I don't know, the universe hasn't told me yet. " said the man by the door, apparently *a/so* The Doctor.

"Wait, you're not another incarnation of her?" said The Doctor in the Victorian clothes.

"Of course he isn't! Otherwise she would have recognized me! And we have to come up with a quick way to differentiate ourselves." said The Doctor, plainly named for now.

"Yeah! Or else it's going to get really frustrating to differentiate ourselves for the narrator." said The Doctor by the door.

"Yeah, we gotta... wait, we have a narrator? What do we need him for?" asked Mike Yates. Mike then sat on a bench to the side and wasn't used for the rest of this story.

"Well, I suppose in this universe, you could call me the Nacho Doctor..." he said pausing to chuckle to himself before continuing, "Because in this universe I am not yo-" The Nacho Doctor began before being cut off.

"Don't do that! Seriously, I've been thrown through time and space and fought more monsters than one sees in a lifetime and I will not tolerate cheap puns." said The Doctor in the Victorian dress.

"We've all fought monsters, dear. But it's 'very' cute you think you're special for doing so in a room full of yourself. Now what shall we call you?" asked The Doctor. The Shalka Doctor scoffed indignantly and crossed his arms, sulking slightly at the quip.

"I suppose you should call me the Shalka Doctor, after a famous battle I had with then across the multiverses." said the Shalka Doctor.

"Oh how very quaint, naming himself after something he expects the entire multiverse to know about already." said the Nacho Doctor.

"Alright, so you're my counterparts from other universes then? Rejected models from the Victorian and the Edwardian eras?" said The Doctor.

The two other universe doctors looked at each other annoyed by the barb.

"And since both of you seem to have a handle about what's going on, have you done anything?" asked The Doctor.

"Well, I assessed the situation and realized the fi-" said the Nacho Doctor.

"Just as I thought, nothing." she said.

"Alright there, I think it's safe for me to step back here before things get too crowded." said the Shalka Doctor.

"What do you mean 'too crowded'? This room... this TARDIS can hold; no wait, you know that. Do you know how ridiculous you sound when you try to explain how big a TARDIS is?" said The Doctor.

"No, I just mean any second now the CIA will be blasting your past self into here to handle this nonsense. So with all the backup that you'd ever need I should be able to just sit back and..." said The Shalka Doctor.

"Really now? That would be very interesting if there was still a CIA." said The Doctor.

"what? What? WHAT?" said The Shalka Doctor with rising intensity.

"Where have I heard that before." quipped The Doctor.

"How can there be no CIA at this point? They should be up there, fighting a grand battle against a black hole energy drain and sending one of your past selves here to help you handle the situation. And then you'd be all 'ah, but I hate you!' and he'd be all 'ah, but I hate you!' and the time lords woul-" said The Shalka Doctor.

“Yeah well, as pleasant as you make that sound the CIA was gone before I even started this trip. They got sucked into that black hole.” said The Doctor.

“You started THAT late into this mess? Oh dear, this is very dire. Are you even on your second renewal?” asked The Shalka Doctor, his brow furrowed with worry and sweat.

“Of course I am, I just got a li- hang on, this is an alternate universe to yours! How do you know this isn’t connected and YOU’RE not supposed to be by my side?” asked The Doctor.

“Because I already did this in my universe. And besides the existence of a multiverse proves that free will and random chance cause incredible enough shifts to make entire universes out of ‘what-if’ scenarios. The fact that we’re here proves that we couldn’t possibly be part of the events here because we brought ourselves here! Just ask the ‘other’ universe hopping Doctor.” said The Shalka Doctor.

“Nope. Sorry, I’m holistic. I don’t even set coordinates anymore before I dematerialize, I just pull the randomizer switch and find out what the hell I’m supposed to be doing when I land.” said the Nacho Doctor with a large grin on his face. The Doctor herself wondered if he wasn’t just making that up to rile up the Shalka Doctor.

The Shalka Doctor scoffed. “You don’t fly your TARDIS?” he said with a disgusted look.

“No! Well.. I used to, but it never really brings you where you want to go, does it? I mean, how many times can you input the coordinates to Blackpool and end up in Space Barcelona before you just accept you’re not supposed to go to Blackpool?” said the Nacho Doctor.

“Grechen, stop trying to make Space Barcelona happen! It’s not going to happen!” said The Doctor before all three of them looked to the same side as if looking into a hard camera.

“So, watching quite a bit of Mean Girls then?” asked the Nacho Doctor.

“I had a bit of catching up to do. I’ve been doing a few marathons of what people call ‘Patrician’ cinema. It’s supposed to be the choice of educated people with taste, but it’s really just a complete bore. I mean, how many times can one watch a scenario that’s supposed to make you uncomfortable before the effect dulls itself? Before you start noticing patterns in things more interesting than the movie itself?” said The Doctor.

“Some people would say that’s seeing patterns in things that aren’t there.” said the Nacho Doctor, standing upright from the door and walking to the console to join them.

“And that’s the last bit of this obnoxious banter that I will allow for the time being! Right, even if I accept that in this scenario I and this thundering tornado of inane absurdity are to be the ones to help you out in a ‘wild’ deviation from what is supposed to happen, which I do under noted protest; what exactly are we supposed to accomplish without Time Lords in this scenario? Last time they were the ones preventing a universal catastrophe while ‘Me’ and ‘Me’ and to a lesser degree ‘Me’ handled the situation. Nothing could stop this planet from being ripped to shreds if no one is around to defend the place.” said The Shalka Doctor.

“Putting aside the verbose nature of that monologue AND that you sound like a damned fool using “inane” and “absurd” in the same sentence considering they mean the same thing; if we just go there and have a chat you’ll find he’s pretty agreeable. He’ll even stop his hostilities upon this planet if we agree to his proposal, he’s promised.” said the Nacho Doctor.

“Wait, WHAT?” said The Doctor and the Shalka Doctor in unison.

“You’ve already gone out to see Omega inside the black hole?” asked the Shalka Doctor, frustrated.

“Wait... wait what? The super cosmic force trying to suck the Time Lords into a black hole for reasons I haven’t worked out yet is Omega? My he- er, Our hero?!? That’s who is causing this mess?” said The Doctor, visibly shaken.

“Good job. What was that you called me a few seconds ago? A thundering tornado of...” the Nacho Doctor said squinting his eyes at the Shalka Doctor.

“Alright, ALRIGHT. ‘I’ am The Doctor here and this is my universe; which you wouldn’t know at all with the ridiculous amount of bickering dialogues the two of you are doing. So I’m going to have to ask the two of you to either defer to me as an authority or to piss off after some Daleks or shopping trolleys.” said The Doctor before taking a deep breath to regain her composure. Her first real adventure in this body and this was how it was going so far. Fantastic.

“Fine, but we’re not just going to keep calling you The Doctor. It’s already getting confusing. Think up some way to differentiate yourself from us. And feel free to make your nickname as dumb as you like, since we’ve already uncorked that genie.” said the Shalka Doctor, looking at the Nacho Doctor with a look of disdain.

Swallowing hard and thinking for a second, The Doctor said “Fine, you can call me...”

The Tardis was spinning toward a black hole with reckless abandon, moving at twice the speed of sound. The Nacho Doctor and Sergeant Benton were hugging each other screaming for dear life as the cloister bell rang and the turbulence jostled the inside with reckless abandon. At the control panel the Shalka Doctor and the newly crowned Exile Doctor were timing the exact moment of dematerialization to pass through the event horizon of the black hole's unimaginable gravitational force where time would be at it's slowest without crushing them so that they could safely plot coordinates into the center of it all without dying violently. Mike Yates continued to sit on the bench, hands in his pockets staring outwards with a grin.

"You know, we could have just lowered the force field and let the monsters take us! At least then we wouldn't have had to drive!" said the Nacho Doctor.

"Wha-? Why in blazes would we have done that?" said the Exile Doctor.

"I...uh, did that the first time. In my universe." said the Shalka Doctor.

"Then why didn't we do that this time?" asked the Exile Doctor as she struggled to make the final adjustments.

"Because you're the boss and you made the decision!" said the Nacho Doctor as he instinctively ran over and pulled the dematerialization lever, Sergeant Benton stumbling to the floor as soon as the Nacho Doctor let go.

To the naked eye, it would have been natural on some level: The Tardis appeared to just fade into the black hole, looking identical to the average dematerialization. Inside the black hole The TARDIS had made a spatial jump based on the temporal degradation rate and relative speed of their movement to move into the estimated center of the black hole.

"With any luck," explained the Shalka Doctor before take off, "Omega will have a pocket dimension of Anti-Matter setup with a stable gravitational force that won't crush us to dust. Probably something similar to a big rock quarry."

"He already does, though it's got a little bit more than that if you can believe it." said the Nacho Doctor at the time.

As The Tardis rematerialized in the pocket dimension, the Exile Doctor downed a shot of vodka and looked over at the Shalka Doctor with a grand moment of clarity, wide with a realization.

“Wait, won’t the TARDIS materializing in an antimatter universe cause a collision of matter and antimatter that will blow up everything and kill us all?” asked the Exile Doctor, her eyes slowly succumbing to panic.

And the pocket dimension exploded and as a chain reaction the entire universe was wiped out by the ensuing blast. Just kidding. We’ve got like, 2/3s of the story left.

“No, if that was true then I wouldn’t have made it here then back and now back here to begin with. Travelling through the skin of an antimatter universe is a lot like travelling between two regular universes. You see, when you pass through the gravitational force and skin of a black hole, there’s a void surrounding the anti-matter making sure the matter and anti-matter don’t touch. We’ll call that “nullamatter.” As we passed through that while dematerialized, we became covered in it, along with the entire ship. We’re completely safe as there is an invisible barrier between us and the anti-matter as the result of coming this way.” said the Nacho Doctor.

The Exile Doctor looked over at the Shalka Doctor for confirmation to which he nodded in agreement. Sergeant Benton was just working his way to his feet.

“Is that something we could reverse the polarity to?” asked Sergeant Benton, half dazed and very shook.

“No, but if we could it would probably blow up all of reality. Best to not do that.” said the Nacho Doctor. Sergeant Benton physically recoiled at the thought and fell back into the rocking chair for a second to catch his balance.

The three doctors headed toward the door, each putting on a stern face as they stood at the door, faces only a few feet away.

“Sergeant Benton” the three of them said in unison.

“We’re going to have to ask you to stay here.” said the Exile Doctor.

“But yo-”

“No no no, we’ll be fine protecting ourselves. We all are perfectly capable incarnations this time.” said the Shalka Doctor.

“But I-”

“Really shouldn’t go out there, old chap. You’d be nothing more than collateral for us to protect from Omega’s psychic onslaught.” said the Nacho Doctor.

“But...”

“Benton, we can have a different adventure later; but this is my first real high-stakes adventure after the exile and sentence and I need to focus. And you two need to stop reading his mind so the poor fellow can finish a sentence. You didn’t even let the narrator have enough time to write ‘Benton said’ before you cut him off. Shame on you.” said the Exile Doctor.

“Yes mum.” the two of them said looking down.

As the doors to the TARDIS opened at the snap of the Exile Doctor’s fingers, a loud and gravely slow rendition of Bach’s Toccata and Fugue in D Minor played on a pipe organ that seemed to echo throughout the entire pocket universe. The three doctors stepped through the door and the Exile Doctor snapped her fingers to close the TARDIS doors behind them to protect Benton and Yates’ ears.

As the creeping, building arpeggiated minor chords that conclude the main theme sounded, none of the Doctors looked particularly amused.

“Bit on-the-nose, innit? How self important do you have to be to introduce something with Toccata and Fugue over a pipe organ” said the Exile Doctor.

The Shalka Doctor squinted in annoyance at the Exile Doctor’s offhand remark. Not that he disagreed with any comment involving a lack of taste and his sixth incarnation; but it still stung to hear someone say, even unintentionally.

In front of them was a large 4 keyboard, 5 octave pipe organ running through what seemed to be everywhere around them. Seated at it and facing away from them was a single, physically imposing humanoid figure with a tall gold helmet and a grand red cape. He was not playing the instrument at all but staring forwards with his arms crossed as the keys pressed themselves. With a subtle nod, he acknowledged the presence of the three doctors before he seemed to grow a pair of legs out of the left side of his body, or that someone superimposed a sideways set of legs from the side of his body. As the legs stood up, an entire duplicate left the chair, as if the figure at the organ was a mirage. After standing up the figure turned and faced them, gesturing outwards towards them in a grand, theatrical fashion.

He spoke his greeting in a strange nasal New Zealand accent that was very calm and friendly. “Kia Ora, Bro! Hey hey hey! How are you doing, Doctors? It’s me, Omega. Yeah, hello. Glad you could come. Hey, I’ve got an idea. Maybe should do things like this all the time. Maybe have some nice adventures, overthrow a few governments. What do you say, mates?”

The three of them stood there shocked for a second, completely confused as to what was going on. The Exile Doctor attempted to say something to articulate the strangeness of the situation, but found herself mouthing words that had no voice to them. Omega coughed and his voice dropped about 3 octaves, adopting an overdramatic english theater accent.

“BROTHER AND SISTER TIME LORDS, IT IS GOOD TO BE IN YOUR COMPANY! I AM GLAD YOU HAVE COME TO MAKE THIS SACRIFICE FOR YOUR HERO SO THAT I MAY ROAM THE UNIVERSE ONCE MORE!” said Omega loud and imposing. His words seemed to reverberate through their bodies at just the right frequency to shake their very beings. If not for the content of his speech sounding pleasant the very tone and intensity of his voice would have led you to believe he was furious.

“Yes, it’s good to see you too Ome- ...Wait a second, did you say sacrifice?” asked the Exile Doctor.

“YES! I ASSUME YOUR OTHER COUNTERPART TOLD YOU OF MY PLIGHT AND HOW I WILL ESCAPE THIS POCKET UNIVERSE; WRECK HAVOC ON THE TIME LORDS AND DESTROY MOST IF NOT ALL OF THE UNIVERSE’S CIVILIZATIONS AND BUILD THEM BACK UP IN MY IMAGE, TO WORSHIP OMEGA!” Omega said (screamed? Idk, it’s omega, man. He’s going to be doing this a lot.) while pointing at Nacho. The Shalka Doctor and the Exile Doctor both looked at him and mouthed “What the fuck.” with fury in their eyes. The Nacho Doctor shrugged and smiled awkwardly.

“HE DID NOT TELL YOU? HE DID NOT TELL YOU! OMEGA HAS BEEN BETRAYED AGAIN BY A TIME LORD! NO ONE CAN BE TRUSTED! LOCK THEM UP!” screamed Omega, clearly screaming as opposed to talking. I think.

“No wait! Maybe we can honestly talk about this! Maybe we could find a possible way to end all this peacefully!” said the Exile Doctor desperately before they were surrounded by monsters from out of nowhere. They appeared to be a large lump of upright flesh covered in gonorrhea with two protruding tentacles. Gell monsters, Omega’s personal guard. One wonders where he got the inspiration for such hideous things. No seriously, google this shit. Freakin’ nasty looking. Like if someone drank a bunch of red kool-aid and then vomited up a pile of round pepperoni chunks with a few octopus tentacles swallowed whole and instead of it all spreading out evenly it just piled up into a mountain of thick, congealed gel-like vomit. Oh yeah, the Exile Doc said something. Here’s what Omega said back.

“YOU EXPECT OMEGA TO LISTEN TO YOU? YOU’RE ALL THEORETICALLY EXACTLY THE SAME PERSONALITY WITH A FEW SUPERFICIAL

CHARACTERISTICS THAT DIFFERENTIATE EACH OTHER! YOU WILL ALL BE HELD UNTIL OMEGA IS READY TO DECIDE WHO OMEGA WILL TAKE OVER!" screamed Omega gesturing with his hands in the sky.

The three doctors were actually taken aback by how clear and concise of a deconstruction of their characters that was.

The three doctors were herded into a dungeon area by the Gell monsters and chained to a wall, their arms and legs shackled away from their bodies to keep them from trying any sort of escape plan.

"What in the HELL was that all about? That's not how this was supposed to happen at all!" screamed the Shalka Doctor.

"Look, I'm sorry. I just... I landed here and I listened to Omega's story, which didn't seem so evil so much as it was a raw deal. I mean, being trapped in a black hole against your will to never see the people you love again? Seemed pretty unfair. So I told him, 'Hey look, maybe you could escape if you switched minds with a Dalek. They have the most single minded wills in the galaxy towards survival', and he grabbed everything off Skaro to try and find a Dalek that could hold his mind and will; but it didn't work out, his mind was too expansive. So then I was like, 'Well the Time Lords have an agency of elite time intervention. If anyone could handle your brain among the Time Lords, it is probably them.' and he grabbed all the time lords from the CIA that existed in the universe. I tried to get him to slow down, but he burned through every single one. But here's the thing, he was listening to me each time. So I decided if he could listen to more than one of me speaking some sense then he might see reason." The Nacho Doctor said looking down shamefully.

"Well that's just perfect, but why exactly did you think you could fix his problem? You're not even The Doctor in this universe! What gave you the right?" said the Exile Doctor, looking more betrayed than angry.

"Well, the universe put me here. I... Look I'm sorry. I really am, but I thought I got up here to help him and it's only made things worse. I got people killed and that's on me. I'm sorry." said the Nacho Doctor

As the Nacho Doctor finished that sentence, another Gell monster walked in carrying a large metal vest with attached headgear meant to keep the wearer's eyes open and a large metal crown to keep the head steady. The Shalka Doctor audibly shivered at seeing the monstrosity, having some intense deja vu.

"It's a body swapping harness. It's meant to subdue an unwilling participant and keep him docile. I've experienced it once, unpleasantly." said the Shalka Doctor with a glint of fear in his eyes.

"Hey! You lot! O'er here! Yeah! Me first!" said the Nacho Doctor. The Gell obliged, annoyed by his outburst and slowly moving toward him with the device.

"What the hell are you doing? I just told you this wasn't your universe! I won't have your blood on m-" asked the Exile Doctor.

As the Gell got close, the Nacho Doctor's hands slipped out of the shackles and he lunged forward, grabbing the large metal apparatus and smacking both Gell dead on to knock them out.

"Okay, now I'm confused. Could you do that all along? Could I have done that all along? Why didn't you tell me you could do that?" asked the Shalka Doctor, his eyes wide and surprised. He began to struggle against his chains but after a second or two he stopped, realizing the uselessness of it.

"I'm holistic, remember? The universe didn't want me locked in those chains, so I wasn't locked in those chains. They completely forgot to lock them for some reason, and I'm pretty sure that reason is the universe." he said before looking at the Exile Doctor. "The universe wanted to let me into your TARDIS, so I just walked on in. Wasn't even locked for me, which is weird because I know all 3 of us lock our TARDIS-es." he said as he waded out of the chains holding his legs in place.

He pulled out his sonic screwdriver and pointed it at the locks on both the Shalka Doctor and the Exile Doctor's shackles, releasing them. As they were released, the two of them walked over to the Nacho Doctor. He looked the Exile Doctor dead in the eyes.

"I really am sorry. It wasn't right, and I didn't even know what universe I was in when I landed. I just... I just wanted to do the right thing." said the Nacho Doctor.

"I know. It's alright." said the Exile Doctor before giving him a hug.

"So are there any other secrets we should know about each other before we go out and face something with the power to burn the brain out of your skull? How about you? How'd you die last? I assume it's why we're here instead of further along." asked the Shalka Doctor to the Exile Doctor.

"Well, you all went through the adventure where we had to call the Time Lords because of the meddling of the War Chief, right? When the time came to answer up I killed myself to switch sexes and hide from the Time Lords. I hid on Earth, trying to blend in

for months and not rock the waves. But it was... dull. Not just boring but it dulled me mentally, a little bit. It took a lot to just stop being that; and when I did I was found before I even made my way to the TARDIS. When they found me they locked me up inside my own TARDIS like I was Schrodinger's Time Lord: if I dematerialized, I wouldn't be able to rematerialize...maybe. They also left a note on the console saying it was all a dog and pony show. Didn't matter, being The Doctor was enough for a while, though not quite enough to keep me happy for a year. I was very close to just giving up when this all happened. And because there was no CIA they've asked me solve it." said the Exile Doctor.

"Sounds about like the time lords pretty much anywhere you find them. Hang on though; did you say you killed yourself to change sexes? As in you used to be a man? And now you're a woman?" said the Shalka Doctor.

"Yes, that's generally how that works when you regenerate into a different sex. Is that really so weird? My last incarnation was a black bisexual in a relationship with a white woman with a foot fetish." said the Nacho Doctor.

"Now THAT sounds interesting. What exactly happened?" asked the Exile Doctor.

"Heart attack during sex. I mean, I was so caught up in the act I never felt it coming, by the time I really felt it I really couldn't stop myself. Imagine you're getting excited and there's some nice foreplay going on to lubricate your toy and suddenly the piece of rubber attached to your waist gets pushed out of the way for the real thing. Quite a shock for all parties, to be honest." said the Nacho Doctor, his expression getting more somber as he spoke. He looked down, with a glint of deep regret and sorrow in his eyes. "And it wasn't... I didn't have time to explain, I tried to apologize... I didn't mean to betray my best friend in the universe, and now... now I don't think I can trust myself enough to even pilot my TARDIS. I dwell between adventures, staring at the stars. It helps me forget the loneliness."

"Well that's brilliant. Two suicide sex changes. You two seem to have this whole "life is sacred" thing down pat." said the Shalka Doctor.

"Ah, and how'd you most recently die then if you're so clever? Meaningful sacrifice I suppose? Saved the universe and your companion and made a meaningful impact doing so?" asked the Exile Doctor.

"I...well it was the end of the Cyber War. I left the door open to the TARDIS and got burned by a Zeppelin explosion trying to close them. But that's really not the point, is it?" said the Shalka Doctor.

“Yeah, let’s just move on then” said the Exile Doctor smiling a cheeky smile.

The Nacho Doctor turned away to walk back towards the throne room where Omega was. Silently, he was fidgeting with his sonic in his fingers, feeling the wood paneling roll along the length of his fingers. His head was looking up, contemplating and unassuming. He might have actually gotten out of the room and made his way to Omega if the Exile Doctor hadn’t put her hand on his shoulder.

“And where do you think you’re going, good sir?” asked the Exile Doctor, confronting him. The Nacho Doctor did not turn around to face her.

“Cleaning up my own mess.” he said stern, but quiet.

“When are you going to learn this isn’t your mess? When are you going to learn this is our mess; mine because I let all this happen in “my” universe and his mess too because he’s The Doctor and he just can’t resist morally sticking his nose into other people’s business when the time comes! So we have to deal with this together, we have to come up with a plan and do the proper work and do this the right way.” said the Exile Doctor. The Nacho Doctor shrugged her hand off and continued walking, his expression unchanged.

“No offense, but I don’t think we need a plan for this one. When have our plans ever worked anyways? We plan, we get there and all hell breaks loose. Then we start improvising. We must have at least a full set of regenerations between all 3 of us. Just once, has a plan ever worked in any lifetime?” said the Nacho Doctor not waiting for a response before disappearing out of view.

“That infuriating bugger. He has a plan, doesn’t he?” said the Exile Doctor.

“Yep.” said the Shalka Doctor.

“He’s just waiting for us to run after him, at a well timed moment so that it all comes together at once, isn’t he?” said the Exile Doctor.

“Yep.” said the Shalka Doctor.

“We’re playing into it right now by discussing it exactly the amount of time he expects us to instead of rushing after him, aren’t we?” said the Exile Doctor.

“Yep.” said the Shalka Doctor.

“Bugger. Is this what we do to people? This kind of infuriating thing; we do this to poor sods?” said the Exile Doctor.

“Yep.” said the Shalka Doctor.

“I hate us.” said the Exile Doctor.

“Yep.” said the Shalka Doctor.

In the meantime the Nacho Doctor approached Omega with a steely-eyed gaze. His fists were clenched white with force to hide the nervous shaking in every joint in his body. He could feel his resolve swaying like a sapling against a storm; at the mercy of the forces around him yet firmly planted in the ground.

“Omega, it’s time to settle this. You must stop this game of death before you do something the universe cannot recover from. Stop now and I could even plead your case with the Time Lords.” he said sternly.

“DOCTOR! IT IS USELESS TO DEFY ME! I IMPORE YOU TO SEE THE SENSE OF JOINING WITH OMEGA! PERHAPS A DEMONSTRATION IS IN ORDER! PREPARE YOURSELF FOR A DEMONSTRATION IN THE DARKEST PART OF MY MIND! CONTACT!” said Omega, before forcing a bridge between The Nacho Doctor and his own mind.

Inside a black void, the Nacho Doctor and Omega stood opposite each other. The Nacho Doctor quickly dropped into a Venusian Aikido stance as Omega charged him, his imposing figure creating a hesitation to the Nacho Doctor’s movements, delaying his actions. Realizing that it would render his technique useless in this option, the Nacho Doctor instead fell forward into a tumbling roll to the side of Omega, the grabbed at his leg to pull him to the ground. Keeping hold he grabbed Omega, used a giant swing maneuver to gain speed and flung him away, creating mental walls for Omega to impact and crash through.

Omega stood up from this assault and laughed heartily. More or less unfazed, he began sprinting towards the Nacho Doctor, who dropped back into a Venusian Aikido stance and this time flipped him. As Omega flipped in the air he grabbed the Nacho Doctor by the neck. Suddenly the Nacho Doctor’s expression of confidence dropped and he felt gravity turn upside-down in Omega’s favor.

The two doctors charged down the hall at full speed, side by side. When they approached the throne room they found the Nacho Doctor facing Omega with his eyes closed, them both frozen in place and concentrating heavily in a battle of wills. The Nacho Doctor was bleeding from the nose and occasionally let out a cough.

“Oh, I know this part! They’re having a psychic battle in the mind! If you’ll excuse me, I’ll be jumping into this immediately. It’s my favorite part of this whole mess.” said the Shalka Doctor as he got into position next to the Nacho Doctor.

“What happened in your universe when this happened?” asked the Exile Doctor, anticipating exactly what he was going to say.

“Oh, I got my head kicked in, beaten within an inch of my life and I was completely at his mercy even with the added help of my second incarnation. But it was incredibly fun!” he said before closing his eyes and making contact to join the battle.

Inside the mind scape it was completely black all around. Omega had the Nacho Doctor held up by the throat punching him repeatedly in the face. He gasped for air and struggled to loosen himself from Omega’s grip enough to breathe. The Shalka Doctor tackled Omega with a full body slam to knock him off balance in order to make him let go of the Nacho Doctor, who immediately fell to his knees, mental image covered in bruises. Straddled atop Omega, the Shalka Doctor began punching Omega in the gold helmet like a bare knuckle brawler with enough force to audibly hear Omega’s head bounce around inside the helmet, bashing against the metal. Eventually, Omega struck back in desperation, sucker punching the Shalka Doctor off him. As he was knocked backwards, the Shalka Doctor staggered over to the Nacho Doctor. The Shalka Doctor gave him a hand up as the Nacho Doctor put up a hand to Omega to signal for a moment’s reprieve as he sucked in air trying to recover.

“Would you like to know a secret?” said the Nacho Doctor to Omega between gasps for breath. “In this body I’m half asian, on my father’s side.” The Shalka Doctor looked at him for a second puzzled before realizing what was happening.

“WHAT? THAT IS ABSURD! YOU ARE NOT OF EARTH! YOU ARE NOT THE HYBRID! YOUR LINEAGE IS NOT OF EARTH’S ASIA! YOU DARE MOCK OMEGA?” screamed Omega his hand clenching in rage and shaking with intensity.

“No no no, it doesn’t have to be Earth at all. Lots of planets have an Asia.” said the Shalka Doctor slyly smiling.

“NO THEY DO NOT! ONLY EARTH HAS AN ASIA! YOU ARE QUOTING SOMETHING... MOCKING ME! YOU ALL OPENLY DEFY ME! YOU CONTINUE TO OPPOSE ME! **THOSE WHO OPPOSE THE WILL OF OMEGA SHALL NOT LIVE! I SHALL DESTROY YOU!**” said Omega, in a declaration so powerful that he broke the formatting conventions of the story.

Outside the mind scape, the Exile Doctor was pacing. After a few seconds she saw a concave dent appear in Omega's helmet and a large cut appear in the Shalka Doctor's head almost simultaneously. A second or so later she saw the Shalka Doctor cough and spit out blood while bruises swelled and took color on the Nacho Doctor's face. Seeing the injuries just growing out of them paralyzed her with fear. They didn't stand a chance! They could die! Someone had to help them! And it looked like that someone was going to be her.

"I have to face my fears. That's more important than to just go on living." she told herself before pulling a flask of vodka from her jacket and taking a long drink and emptying out it's contents. No more stalemates. She then got into position after a second next to the two doctors, closed her eyes and made contact. "Where there's life, there's..."

Inside the mind scape the Exile Doctor saw the two doctors on their knees, badly injured before Omega. They were about to collapse from exhaustion, sweat dripping down their faces. Nacho's eyes were nearly swollen shut with bruises, and the Shalka Doctor was clutching his stomach with blood running out from his mouth. Both of them were far too injured to notice her entering.

"HEY YOU! STOP BEATING UP MY FRIENDS! STOP BEATING UP MY UNIVERSE! NOW!" The Exile Doctor said. But as Omega turned to face her, she was nowhere to be seen.

Instantly he felt himself being flipped off the ground by Venusian Aikido. Instinctively he reached out to grab at the Exile Doctor's arm that was flipping him and steady himself before reversing gravity, but no one was there. Instead, he felt a sharp rabbit punch to the back of his neck and felt intense pain shoot through his nervous system. He recoiled in agony, attempting to see his attacker in mid-air, only to receive a swift kick that changed his direction completely and sent him flying. Before he could get his bearings on the momentum shift, he suddenly found himself being struck by an axe handle fist coming downwards, slamming into his helmet and bashing him into the ground.

The Nacho Doctor and the Shalka Doctor were stunned by the Exile Doctor throwing and beating on Omega like a rag doll.

"Wait, we can teleport spam? Since when?!?" said the Shalka Doctor.

"Man, I can barely see through my swollen eyelids. You think I would have gotten this beaten up if I could do THAT?" said the Nacho Doctor.

“Fair enough. We should probably help her though.” he said before helping Nacho up and the two of them charging forward.

As the two other doctors charged forward, they both raised a fist and punched at the same time landing a shot squarely to Omega’s helmet. At the exact same time the Exile Doctor punched a different side. As the impact rattled Omega inside his helmet and bounced his head against the metal, an incredibly powerful psychic force field blasted all 3 of our heroes backwards onto the ground sprawled on their backs in opposite directions.

“**ENOUGH!**” screamed Omega before walking over to the Shalka Doctor and putting his foot on the Shalka Doctor’s throat. He raised it, preparing to stomp down and kill the Shalka Doctor.

“I AM THE FOUNDER OF TIME TRAVEL! I AM A GOD! I WILL NOT KEEP PLAYING A CHARADE SO THAT YOU CAN PRETEND THAT YOU HAVE THE POWER TO MEET MY LEVEL OF-...” started Omega before being cut off by a deep, passionate kiss. Disarmed at the development he gently put his foot back down, not realizing no one was even there when his foot met a solid footing. In fact, with the exception of the mysterious figure kissing him, there was no one at all in the mindscape.

The Skin Diamond Doctor wrapped her arms around Omega in a tight embrace, sensually running her hands through his robes and massaging his powerful muscles; kissing him through his helmet. Omega’s thoughts seemed to melt away in sensual feelings that he had not felt in a long time. It was a complete sensory overload so powerful that he did not hear the click of the mental hand cuffs that now restrained him.

“Now!” she screamed, stepping away from Omega.

The Eighth Doctor pulled a lever, causing the ground to disappear from under Omega. He fell into an incredible mental water slide completely in the dark of the mind scape. His body was tossed to and fro, his mind suddenly unbalanced and unable to center itself for any kind of psychic orientation. Small spots on the side were completely dry, causing powerful burns to suddenly rub him, a universal and powerful sensation of incredible unpleasantness that distracted him even further.

At the bottom of the slide, the Nick Briggs Exile Doctor waited with a big smile. Lifting a mental atomic ray gun so the sights were to his eyes, he took aim and fired at Omega as he fell out of the tube, firing a beam that stunned his psyche into a complete mental paralysis. After he finished shooting, he lifted the far end of the barrel to his lips and blew across in a cliched manner.

The Eighth Doctor and the Skin Diamond Doctor both walked up behind the Nick Briggs Doctor and each put a hand on his shoulder, staring down on the fallen foe before them.

“Well, look at this! Appears we got here just in the nick of time. What does that make us?” asked the Eighth Doctor; more enthusiastic than cool and charismatic than that line is usually delivered.

“Big damn he-” started the Skin Diamond Doctor before she was cut off.

“Don’t do that! Seriously, I’ve been thrown through time and space and fought more monsters than one sees in a lifetime-MMMBFL” started the Briggs Doctor before the Exile Doctor covered his mouth from behind.

“Shhhh. Trust me, you don’t want to finish that thought because that female Doctor over there is about to say something quick-witted and sarcastic that will humiliate you in return. You’re better off keeping quiet.” said the Exile Doctor, gesturing to the Skin Diamond Doctor who wore a devilish glint in her eyes. The Briggs Doctor crossed his arms and sulked in response.

“So what are we going to do now?” asked the Nacho Doctor, his face back to normal.

“I have an idea, but we’re all going to need to concentrate.” said the Shalka Doctor.

The Doctors nodded in agreement and joined hands in a circle around Omega, their minds connected now. With their wills combined, they mentally suppressed Omega’s powerful telepathic abilities, separating it from the rest of his mind and locked them away.

The job done, our three doctors turned and walked in separate directions to split up the mind scape. The three previous regeneration doctors stayed for a second to have a quick chat one last time.

“Did they plan for us to split off from their psyche and already have a plan in place, you think?” said the Skin Diamond Doctor.

“Yep.” said the Eighth Doctor.

“Are we always so infuriatingly manipulative that we can depend on other people to make choices they haven’t made yet for themselves?” asked the Skin Diamond Doctor.

“Yep.” said the Eighth Doctor.

“No wonder The Master hates us.” said the Skin Diamond Doctor.

“Yep.” said the Eighth Doctor.

Outside the mind scape, back in the throne room the 4 participants were recovering. Wiping the blood off themselves, the three doctors looked at Omega who was staring at his hands; processing the extent of what he had just lost.

“OMEGA’S PSYCHIC POWERS! GONE! INCREDIBLE! BUT I MUST HAVE MY REVENGE ON THE UNIVERSE! ON GALLIFREY! ON YOU, DOCTOR!” said Omega, our formatting back to normal for Omega’s speech thanks to his defeat. Normal for him at least.

“Impossible. A beating that bad would have left anyone seconds from death! How are you talking, much less standing?” said the Shalka Doctor, amazed.

“FOOL! OMEGA MAY NOT HAVE HIS POWERS, BUT HIS WILL IS INDOMITABLE! THIS ENTIRE UNIVERSE EXISTS BECAUSE OMEGA BELIEVES IT MUST BE SO! AND EVEN WITHOUT HIS POWERS, OMEGA’S WILL TO LIVE IS GREATER THAN YOUR COMPREHENSION! MY UNCEASING WILL BENDS SINGULARITY! IF YOU HAD TRULY MANAGED TO DEFEAT ME, THE ENTIRE POCKET UNIVERSE WOULD COLLAPSE IN ON ITSELF! I AM TRULY THE ATLAS OF THIS REALITY! AS SUCH, I HAVE NO NEED FOR THOSE POWERS NOW! I CAN USE THE BODY SWITCHING MECHANISM, I HAVE MINIONS THAT MY WILL CONTROL, AND NOW? NOW I HAVE TIME LORDS THAT I CAN SWITCH BODIES WITH! I COULD SPLIT MY MIND INTO 3 OF YOU IF I WISH; A PERSONALITY PRESERVING MYSELF FROM BEFORE FALLING INTO THIS STAR, A PERSONALITY PRESERVING MYSELF AS I DISCOVERED THE POWER TO CONTROL SINGULARITY AND A PERSONALITY OF MYSELF AS I AM NOW! OMEGA COULD HAVE AN ULTIMATE CONQUEST THROUGHOUT ALL OF TIME AND SPACE!” Omega roared.

Around them, Gell guards formed through the walls and surrounded them.

10...20...50...100 in the throne room. There was barely enough room to breathe, let alone move. Desperately among the chaos, the Exile Doctor put up her sonic screwdriver and aimed it at the pipe organ and activated it. Miraculously, the screwdriver activated the keys, pressing them down through sheer sonic vibration and playing a plagal cadence that stopped everyone in surprise. Go look up what a plagal cadence is. We’re foreshadowing an appearance.

The Exile Doctor cleared her throat. “Omega, it doesn’t have to be this way. We could find a way to bring you back, we could take you back to your family; back to your friends where you could be a hero! A member of the high council where you could sit around and wear robes and eat grapes and sign important documents! You could have anything

you truly desired instead of this conquest. Literally anything! You could see the universe! You could watch creation begin and end in the same hour in person! You could see miracles, create them! Help people and take your proper place among legends as a living, breathing being.” she said.

Omega stayed frozen for a moment. Perhaps it was the sincerity in the Exile Doctor’s voice, perhaps it was just the agonizing longing that had plagued his soul for so long; but for a brief moment, Omega truly considered the ramifications of a potential reality that was presented. In that moment, the lights shone brighter and the hall became more ornate with gold fittings intertwining and polished to a mirror sheen; reflecting a great hope that was swelling inside of Omega. The Three Doctors smiled at each other and it could truly have been the end of the whole scenario; barring the explosive sound that rang out from nowhere.

The explosion echoed through the throne room, blasting Omega’s helmet with his head cleanly off his shoulders. Behind him stood The Master holding some kind of kinetic energy gun inside the doorway to the Shalka Doctor’s TARDIS, grinning an evil grin as Omega’s headless body fell to the ground uselessly.

“You idiot! He was bending the singularity that kept this whole place in existence! We’re going to die!” screamed the Shalka Doctor at The Master.

“Not yet!” said Old Joe, now the President of Gallifrey, speaking through the Matrix into their minds like some kind of big damned hero.

“Joe! Wonderful to hear from you. Can you keep helping us with the whole ‘not being dead’ thing?” said the Exile Doctor.

“What in blazes do you think I’m doing? I’m projecting my will through the Matrix and keeping this universe together. But I only have a few minutes before I exhaust myself, so get going!” he said.

Without a moment’s hesitation the Shalka Doctor ran to his TARDIS and the Exile Doctor and the Nacho Doctor ran to the Exile Doctor’s TARDIS. The two TARDISEs dematerialized, escaping the universe... with actually another 3 or 4 minutes to go, but the Exile Doctor didn’t tell Old Joe that so that he could keep struggling to exhaustion and collapse.

In a flower field, two TARDISEs materialized doors pointed toward each other. The doors to them both opened wide and 3 figures fell on their backs in exhaustion. Looking at each other for a brief moment, all three burst out laughing and stared at the midday

sky. Above them streaking across with long trails of black smoke was a cluster of asteroids in a pattern resembling a grand V; almost like a spearhead.

The Shalka Doctor laughed. "What, you haven't handled that yet?" he said grinning and looking at her.

The Exile Doctor raised an eyebrow back at him. "I don't know if you've noticed but I've been a bit busy."

"Well, I don't know if this will be like the time me or him handled this situation, but I think we can afford to take a day before we go our separate ways. Give the Autons a head start. Usually we're in a hospital the first day of this anyways." said the Nacho Doctor. The Shalka Doctor nodded in agreement with a big grin on his face.

"Wait, what are autons?" asked the Exile Doctor with a look of bewilderment.

"Spoilers." said the Nacho Doctor.

"That's a rubbish line. Don't use it again." said the Shalka Doctor.

The Exile Doctor raised her hand to snap her fingers and put a record on, but was stopped by the Nacho Doctor, who snapped and put a different one on. It was "Handle Me With Care" by the Travelling Willburys.

"I've been uptight and made a mess, but I'll clean it up myself, I guess. Oh, the sweet smell of success... handle me with care" sang George Harrison on the record. The Three Doctors smiled while listening to the recording, as the song had a different, sentimental message to each of them.

"Can I come out yet?" asked Mike Yates from inside the TARDIS.

DOCTOR WHO WILL RETURN IN THE GIANT OF BACHAND HALL.

The Giant of Bachand Hall

by Nacho

What if the Nacho Doctor encountered the Reapers from 'Father's Day' in a story of particular temporal interest?

It was nearly 1:30 in the morning, and all the lights were out in the Bachand Hall orphanage. Not a soul stirred, and outside street lamps flickered and hummed a furious struggle, attempting to reach out across the darkness and guide the lost souls in the night home. It was a twilight like any other on that fateful night, perhaps a bit chillier with the breath of a cold front wafting across the air with the special sort of sting that encourages travelers indoors; but it was not under any circumstances even a degree removed from ordinary. No one usually would have suspected a thing, but then again Brittany Walsh of room 214 inside Bachand Hall wasn't the sort of person you could describe as "usually".

Lying in the darkness, she had her eyes shut tight, forced closed with such a with such a herculean effort that her lids wrinkled. The rest of her body was curled up under the covers and in her mind she repeated a very important phrase, one that had mostly kept her safe and happy for the majority of 12 years on Earth: "Please Sleep. Don't Dream."

Most nights she repeated the phrase to herself like a mantra. Some nights she did it aloud; and only once had she ever gotten caught doing it. The punishment for that was severe. Some nights she would unwittingly find her mind adrift while attempting to repeat it non-verbally in some way. On the rarest of occasions, she managed to not think the phrase and drift off to sleep without a dream behind her eyelids.

But tonight as she repeated and begged her own body towards rest, there was a different air to the young Miss Walsh's room, a different feeling on an unnamable sense. Ignoring it as hard as she could, she even had begun to repeat the phrase aloud to herself when she suddenly heard someone open the window a little bit and drop it, a sound she could not ignore.

"Hello, I'm the Doctor. If you don't mind I'll just be going." he said adjusting his newsboy cap and pulling out the sonic screwdriver from his vest. He set the device to the Trans-Temporal setting and activated it the second Brittany started screaming, the screwdriver listening one microsecond into the future and producing a noise cancelling

wave to counter her scream as she produced it, resulting in complete silence. As soon as she was out of breath he turned it off and spoke to calm her down.

"I'm not here to hurt you, dearie. I just needed to get out of the building, the front door is locked and I have no other means of escape. I didn't mean to disturb you. I'm just a storyteller and I've got what I came here for. Please, just go back to sleep and let me leave." said The Doctor. He began fidgeting with the window, trying to get it open enough to climb out.

"What were you doing in here?" asked Brittany.

"What?" asked The Doctor, too caught up in his own actions to have been listening to what she said.

"I asked what you were doing here so late at night that you can't use the front door." said Brittany, now sitting on the edge of the bed.

"I was trying to che-... look, you seem a nice girl and I am really sorry to have woken you, but I don't have time for an Ask Me Anything session. Please just let me concentrate." said The Doctor, before kicking himself with the realization that they were far out of time for Brittany to know what an AMA was.

"Fine. But just so you know I wasn't even sleeping yet. I can't sleep tonight it seems." said Brittany, her arms crossed and frustrated.

Just as he had the window open and was about to climb out, he felt a tug at his shirt. He froze and turned to look at the source, finding Brittany there.

"Sir please, before you go could you tell me a bedtime story?"

"What? No. Out of the question!" he said to her.

"Please?" she said, her face having that pathetic kind of desperation that only children have and can melt your heart.

"Fine, but it'll be a short one because I really do have to meet up with someone. And to be honest, it's not a bedtime story at all." said the Doctor.

But Brittany wasn't really listening. She was instead climbing into her bed and covering herself in an unkempt cocoon of blankets. The Doctor smiled at the sight of it, it reminded him of a time when he would have done exactly the same thing. Children will be children, it seems.

Tucked in and ready, Brittany eyed the Doctor with enthusiasm as he sat on the bed and smiled a gentle and weary smile. For a second, she wondered how old the Doctor was to wear such a strange expression, despite a youthful appearance.

“Once upon a time, I was a great traveller who went anywhere I could; and I went looking for the universe’s most interesting stories. I travelled far and wide meeting the most interesting people and helping them with a great deal of situations. I met kings and queens, Olympic athletes, movie stars...” began The Doctor.

“Judy Garland?” asked Brittany.

“What?” asked The Doctor.

“Have you met Judy Garland? I love Judy Garland.” asked Brittany.

The Doctor loosened his collar a bit, looking away for a second with a tinge of blood rushing to his face. “I do too. She’s a very nice woman.”

“...And so one day, when I wandered to the farthest corner of the Earth; past deserts and tundras, over mountains and through trenches to find my favorite spot to be alone when I need to have a moment to myself: The Collision. It is a spot where the sweet and sour winds collide; where the flap of a butterfly’s wings becomes a hurricane and the rush of wind from an explosion becomes a mere pleasant ocean breeze. The rivers run there like a marathon sprinter and the sunlight kisses it like it’s one true love. The heat of fire escapes to there and the chill of your breath when you blow on your soup meets it to shake hands as equals.

And in a spot where all the winds and forces of nature collide is a single area where if you listen hard enough and concentrate, the words spoken by every single person will eventually be carried and you can hear for a brief moment exactly where you need to be. It’s magical, but only if you have the time and patience to listen for it.

It was in that place that I first heard the faintest whisper about the giant, a sorrowful old man who had lived a life larger than any who had ever stepped foot on this Earth; but try as I might I searched but could find no other trace of this giant on any of the winds. It was if no one else would talk about him. I became convinced that whatever reason he was never mentioned again must have been because they were afraid of him. So I ventured backwards along the breeze to the place where the wind had carried that small, gentle whisper, to a great stone building very much alike this one, except older and a lot more weathered by nature... and near completely empty, except for one room, large and largely empty.

There, at a fireplace sitting in an armchair alone, was a small sorrowful old man. To be honest, for a brief moment I had half a mind to turn and leave as I was convinced I was in the wrong area, that some cross breeze must have taken the words to the wind I had heard them on. All those objections went away when I saw the man crying there. So I came forward, taking a chair I found in the room and sat beside him, for a few moments in an unspoken agreement. He gathered up his thoughts in this time, trying to form a coherent message for me through the veil of his regrets. What form did they take? A story." said The Doctor.

"A story? You're going to tell a story during a story?" asked Brittany.

"Yeah. Hush yourself." said The Doctor.

"Listen, are you taking this seriously? A story within a story seems to me a very contrived plot device, to be honest." said Brittany, now slightly annoyed.

"You asked 'me' for a story, kid. If you wanted a different one then you should have asked someone else." said the Doctor with a scolding tone.

"I bet he's going to be a Doctor too." remarked Brittany under her breath.

"In fact he was. The man told me his name was... hold on, I'm trying to remember. Doctor... Doctor Quae! Yes, that was it, Doctor Quae. And he was the attending physician at the building long ago when it was a different kind of facility. While he was here he met a little girl who would change his life. The girl was an orphan, not unlike yourself. Her parents had died in an attack by a wicked alien army from the planet Mondas while the girl was at a very young age; and was left on the doorstep to the orphanage with a card containing her name and no other information. As she grew she was plagued by horrible nightmares no one could explain, which were memories burned into her mind from the incident that robbed her of her parents. It caused her to become irritable, fearing sleep. No prospective parents would adopt her because of what she felt was wrong with her and she shut herself off from the world. She often was very angry; picking fights. As the result, Doctor Quae and the girl grew quite close together as he saw her time and again to patch up her scrapes.

A man who had devoted his life to children and the study of their development, he was always fascinated with helping the least fortunate, mostly donating his time to the children and the great stone building. He took very little salary, not much more than he needed to survive, and even what he needed to survive was lessened by him keeping a permanent residence at what was the Orphanage.

The little girl was a fascinating case to him; not simply another child to watch grow, he mended wounds and heard her battle stories from the hell-ish trenches of the parking lot scuffles. Slowly but surely, he spent every day working out the tangled web of her life's problems and giving her strategies to cope. He even gave her a little strategy to find a way to get some relief from her tortured insomnia. She began to make friends, interact with people and it seemed to be a miracle! In return, the girl provided a human face that he saw every day on an almost scheduled basis. In all, it seems they were making great strides and Doctor Quae felt a growing sense of pride and love at the girl's accomplishment toward acceptance and a normal life.

That all changed on the girl's birthday, where her horrifying memories came back when she least expected them. They came back in such a powerful way that they awoke a sinister fear inside Doctor Quae: the fear of defeat. In the moment he saw the girl plagued by nightmares again despite their strategies. He saw what the darkness inside her truly looked like: a loved one that would never escape her demons no matter what simple coping mechanisms she tried. A terrified child who would be plagued with sleepless nights and pained to never truly function as a human being. A love that would always be in pain if he didn't do everything in his power to help her.

So Doctor Quae did what he thought best for her as her physician: to cut what was creating these terrible visions. As he entered the operating room on that day, he passed through the swinging doors with the girl holding his hand as she was put under. The ice pick in his hand shook in the room, and for a brief moment he admitted to himself that he loved the girl as more than a patient: he loved her like a daughter.

The lobotomy suffered complications, and Doctor Quae's daughter died in front of him.

The years went on, and in time medicine and phrenology improved casting doubt on the effectiveness of lobotomies. They became known as monstrous operations, the stuff of nightmares as opposed to legitimate procedures. For his part, Doctor Quae never performed one again and became morose at his work; often carrying a single heavy question that distracted him constantly: "could she have been saved?" Years later when his orphanage closed he personally bought the building and emptied out every room except one, enshrining it as a tribute to the brief flame of life that had changed his life forever. The End."

"The end? That was a terrible bedtime story!" said Brittany.

"I didn't say it was a bedtime story. I specifically said it was NOT a bedtime story." said The Doctor, looking down.

“Fix it.” said Brittany.

“What?” said The Doctor, shocked at her request.

“Fix the ending. It’s a story, so fix it!” said Brittany.

“What? You can’t just go around fixing people’s lives! Not just for a story!” said The Doctor.

“Yes you can. You can and you will, because it’s rubbish that people have to suffer needlessly when you can do something about it.” said Brittany, outraged.

The Doctor smiled a big, stupid toothy grin and adjusted his cap to hide a single tear from his eye. There it was, the best of humanity.

The TARDIS landed in Bachand Hall with a wheezing fit that ended with a large thump of a cadence. The Doctor opened the door and peeked outside to see the old man asleep in his chair by the fire. He smiled and patted the door, saying “Thanks dear, I’ll take care of the rest.”

Brittany ran to the man in the chair and hugged him, waking him up. The man in the chair was speechless, trying to work out if he was in a dream; but despite his disbelief he found himself unable to contain the powerful emotions inside him and hugged the girl tight for all he could muster.

The Doctor looked over toward a window and saw a large, winged figure outside flapping around like a vulture. Quietly from at the doorway so as not to disturb the moment, he reached behind the coat rack of his TARDIS and casually pulled out the Demat Gun, with a spare newsboy cap hanging off the end of the barrel that he casually threw back into the TARDIS. He told himself he’d pick it up off the floor later.

Quietly as a mouse he walked over to the window. He struggled for a minute, trying to open it with one hand while holding the Demat Gun before realizing it was locked and becoming very embarrassed. When it was open he took aim at the Reaper trying to feed off the temporal paradox in the room, adjusting until the automatic sights he had installed on the weapon locked in on it, being careful lest he dematerialize half the sky from the planet.

“Love from Gallifrey, bro.” he said as he fired the weapon and in a moment of complete overkill, erased the Reaper from existence forever. Other Reapers would smell that temporal disturbance and stay far away.

With that settled he put the gun back inside behind the coat rack and went to the console, hitting the print button. The console then beeped a loud and important but annoying sound to remind him he forgot to load any paper into it. With a few seconds more to load in the paper he packed all the important documents he would need neatly into a manilla folder and presented them to "Doctor Quae". The top sheet was an adoption paper, only requiring his signature; the rest was new identity forms to live in this new time period and an appointment with a psychologist from the current era who specialized in PTSD in children and teenagers.

"You've a giant personality and an even greater heart, Doctor. Thank you. With abilities like yours you must live an incredible, full life." said the old man. The Doctor smiled. There it was again, and like always it brought out the very best in The Doctor as well.

After everything was wrapped up, The Doctor went back to his TARDIS and smiled, wordlessly waving goodbye. The destination programmed in, he snapped his fingers to close the doors before taking off. He couldn't make amends to Her, sometimes you just fall too hard; but perhaps just a look to make sure she was safe and happy? That was enough for this lifetime. The snap also caused Tender by Blur to begin playing over his record player.

As the TARDIS began to wheeze and fade out of existence, Brittany watched and waved back smiling, satisfied with her happy ending. But one thing still bothered her and as she stood beside her new father holding his hand, she swallowed hard to work out the lump in her throat to ask the question before the TARDIS had completely faded it's last fade.

"How did you know the Mondasians had killed my parents if I had just appeared at the orphanage one day?" said Brittany.

"The Mondasian attack killed your parents?" asked her father, slightly confused.

Train of Thought

by Nacho

What if the Nacho Doctor had a story introducing Ellie Kendrick as Cleo?

Cleo put her car into park to let the engine idle and save petrol at the level crossing on the way to work. The signal in front of her was broken, and put out a false crossing every day at the same time. Over the past few weeks it had become so expected that she even got into a habit of looking at herself in the mirror while waiting to check her hair and complexion.

Cleo didn't actually like to look at herself in the mirror; her long brunette hair and glasses made her feel so... ordinary. Most days she would find some imperfection immediately to be disgusted with in herself and close the mirror.

Today as she let the car idle she decided she would muster up the willpower and not look in the mirror. In fact she even decided to put up the radio in an attempt to stop herself from thinking about even looking in the mirror.

Try as she might, messages of self-deprecation flowed into her head. Maybe just a little peek to quiet them? Maybe she would notice how dumb the bandaid she used to keep the bridge of her glasses together looked.

No, no she would need to stay firm. Concentrating harder than ever, she felt her will nearly ready to break and look in the mirror when something broke through her concentration: a man flying by parallel to the train tracks.

It was a split second image, but she was sure she had seen it. It was even in a recognizable Superman pose like you see in the comics with one arm out.

The image of which kept Cleo enraptured by the time the divider went up and the signal had ended. For a few minutes afterwards she continued to find herself lost in thought, paralyzed by her own confusion. It took an actual car horn to stir her from within herself, the sound of which had her jumping from her seat.

For the rest of the day in her tank top and jeans she worked building stage sets for the local theater, alone and empty under the spotlights as she toiled away. Painting and nailing, creating benches and parks, grand designs of far off places and laying tracks for backgrounds that could be easily wheeled out in the dark. She created palaces,

caverns, mountains; once even Oz itself from her own imagination (and an old vhs copy of the Wizard of Oz that cut off just around the poppy fields from decay).

She could create fairy tale lands and alien worlds for the actors to inhabit; and how she prided herself on how authentic it all could be as she would often sit among her creations at the end of the day.

But today ideas weren't quite coming the same way they normally would. Today she found herself picturing a man flying by in a Superman pose. A man with a newsboy cap.

It took until after lunch to wipe the image from her mind. Pushing it aside wasn't a difficult task with as bland a lunch as corn chowder and toast, but it being the third day of leftovers it seemed a better option than black coffee and buttered bread for a meal. Lost in her own worlds at work she sometimes forgot mundane: going shopping seemed such a hassle when you could push it off and create a planet.

But by the end of the day she found herself drawn to the event again, now sitting in the middle of a Turkish Bazaar and picturing the man flying up to her. Edwardian dress, she had decided he would be wearing. A proper fox hunting gentleman.

She even began to sketch the scene in her notepad. Up a city street, around the spires of the buildings, creating a mighty gust of wind as he passed by. And he would land before her and smile. It would be a calm, reassuring grin; and he would take her off on adventures to see all the things she designed come to life, all the worlds and people real. And he would take her away from three day old Corn Chowder and olive oil-butter substitute spread on toast.

As she finished her sketch she squinted, trying to work out the fine details through her cheap lenses. One day soon she would have to go see a doctor and get a better prescription for her glasses, she thought as she packed her stuff away to end the day.

As she sat at the light the next day, the signal blaring and warning of the man flying by again, she concentrated on the tracks trying to catch a glimpse. Maybe she would work up the courage and yell something to him. Maybe he would land and they would block traffic together.

The more she concentrated the more she felt herself pulled into her own fantasy. After a few minutes she saw nothing. Damn her own wandering mind for she must have missed the man. Or maybe he had never flown by at all. Silently she chided herself for her childish fantasy.

And then she was stirred out of her own thoughts again, this time by a paper ball hitting her windshield with some force.

Cleo scrambled outside to check what had hit her car, eventually finding the paper ball and uncrumpling it with astonishment. What was inside? A love letter? A secret decoder message only she had the wits to figure out? A secret recipe for the best tortellini soup you ever tasted?

“Could you help me down?”

As she looked down the tracks she saw his shadow fading into the distance, confirmation of his existence. For the next day she contemplated his message, thinking about what he meant. He was clearly flying, couldn't he just land himself? Why didn't he? Why her?

The thoughts consumed her actions for the next day again, and this time she instead of waiting inside her car she got out and stood at the crossing, looking expectantly down the tracks.

As he came into view she shouted “HOW?” at the top of her lungs at him, but the man did not reply. Instead, she felt a rush of wind as he passed and fell on her back as she was hit in the face by another paper ball.

This one read, “I dunno, could you bring a mattress or something?”

She was about to yell that a mattress could never fit into her car when she realized that he was already gone. So the next day she drove towards the tracks with the windows open and her mattress tied to the roof of her car, attached by bungee cords around the top.

Laying the mattress out carefully on just in front of her car she waited and sat expectantly on the hood of her car as she watched the train signal begin. Her heart began to race with anticipation of him landing in front of her, full of gratitude.

What would his first words be? Ooooo, the thought was so exci-.

The man fell to the side from his parallel flight, landed on the mattress and ricocheted off, flying towards Cleo's car and landing on Cleo herself on the hood. He grinned an awkward smile as he looked at her, climbing up instinctively and checking her for injuries.

“Easy, easy. Sorry about the fall but it appears you're unhurt.” he said as he scanned her with a wand that made a high pitched, white noise type of constant sound. “I'm the

Doctor, by the way. Thank you for the landing assist.” he said smiling a manic, gleeful grin.

His wand was a long, silver handle with gold branches running like veins along the shaft with a turquoise emitter ring at the end with a similarly coloured bullet in the center. The ring was attached to the bullet by spokes which spun the ring around the bullet when the device was in use. As he finished scanning, the noise died down and he popped it up the sleeve of his long sleeve shirt.

Before she could reply to introduce herself she took a breath only to find him already standing up and scouting his way down the tracks. She went to adjust her glasses and found they were bent by the impact.

“Excuse me, what’s your Wi-Fi password?” he asked, calling back to her without turning his head.

“I... don’t have Wi-Fi here. We’re in the middle of the road by a train crossing.” she said walking up to him and giving him a once over to make sure she was seeing what she was seeing. Yep, definitely a pre-WW1 fox hunting gentleman’s attire, albeit without the suit coat.

He turned to look at her, confused. “Isn’t this 2018? There should be Wi-Fi in every home!” he said.

“We’re nowhere near my home!” she informed him, now getting the sneaking suspicion that she might be dealing with an idiot.

“Oh? Then what do you call that?!?” he shouted accusingly and pointed his wand at her car, now in his hand.

“A car! It’s a car and I DON’T live in that, you idiot!” she exclaimed in frustration.

“Oh dear, you’re quite right. That IS a car. My apologies.” he said scratching the back of his neck, embarrassed.

With some humility, The Doctor finally turned and gave her some attention and immediately noticed that her glasses were broken. In a deft motion he snatched them off her face and began repairing them with his wand.

“What are you doing you insufferable...” she asked as he finished and put them back on her. Not only was the bridge fixed, but the lenses were finer...better adjusted to her vision. She was seeing clearer than ever.

"My sonic screwdriver did that. Vibrated the broken bridge of the glasses on a molecular level and re-fused them back together, then the sonic vibrations ground down the lenses to a finer magnification to adjust to your eyes. It's a neat tool if your into alien technology. Works well at parties."

She looked at him in astonishment. Alien technology? Who was this? Like a lump in her throat she had barely begun the word "Thanks" when he started talking again.

"Do you want to see some?" he asked with a smile, a sort of devilish grin on the cusp of mischief.

"I'm sorry, some... what?" Cleo asked confused.

"Alien technology! Aliens! Other planets! Histories and mysteries and the cosmos and your neighbor's backyard, if you like! Do you want to see it? Would you like to see it all?" said The Doctor very excited now. His words were charged with electricity. "Doesn't even matter! You owe me for fixing your glasses! C'mon, it'll be good for you!"

"I... I'm sorry what? I don't owe you! If anything you owe me for saving your life from..." she began, before losing momentum as she realized she had no idea why he needed that mattress to begin with.

"The invisible train I was hanging off the roof of." he said very confidently and matter-of-fact like it was a normal thing.

"Oh right, the invisible trai-... wait, what? Nevermind, the fact is that I saved YOUR life. I don't owe you a thing! If anything you owe me!" Cleo said with building confidence before getting into his face.

The Doctor put up one finger and gently guided her face backwards by pushing on her forehead.

"I don't owe you! I could have jumped from that invisible train at godforsaken speeds at any point I wished!" said The Doctor still grinning, a poker face of enthusiasm staring blankly at Cleo, but she wasn't having any of it.

"Oh? And what, gotten killed on impact? Here lies... what did you call yourself again? Oh yeah. Here lies The Doctor, died of not a bullet, but a bullet train! May God put to rest his road pizza remains!" she chided, smiling back at him. The Doctor's expression had a slight crack in it.

"No, I really would have survived it! Honest! I would have just ended up looking like an off-brand Mavis Beacon again" he said joking before clutching his head like he had been hit with a blunt object. He fell to his knees in agony.

"YOU CHEEKY FUCK!" screamed his previous incarnation into his ear.

"Are you alright?" asked Cleo running over to him and helping him up.

"Yeah just a touch of dizziness, I think." he said getting to his feet.

"Listen, is there anything else that I can fix for you in trade off and maybe get your help in travelling through space? I really need to get my ship and it's on that train. And as I am loathe to admit, it's a little beyond my capabilities alone." he said looking at her now, seriously.

"Doctor, there's really nothing you could do to make me trade off. I mean, I didn't do this because I was expecting anything in return; I would help anyone in need if I could and god knows I'm always up for adventure. But I have to work and I-" she paused, noticing a strange expression on The Doctor's face. "What? What is it?"

"You just said you would do it." He said smiling.

"I said I need to work as well. Did you miss that bit or do you just not listen past the point where you hear what you want?" she replied in disbelief, a tinge of annoyance shooting across her brow like electricity.

"I usually don't listen past the point where I hear what I want, if we're being honest. Saves space while I work a plan to get you out of ambiguity. And besides, I have a "time" machine. We can be there and back with no consequences except looking a little bit older to your colleagues." said The Doctor.

"Yeah? Well unle-" she said before being cut off by a heavy wheezing sound. Behind her, a big, blue police phone box had just appeared.

From inside the doors, another Cleo poked her head out of the box and waved towards herself. By the car, Cleo stared at herself in disbelief.

"Quick list of thoughts you're having: It does travel in time and space and it's pretty great; yes I am you; He just flaunts his own rules to save time and it is ridiculous; and yes it was exactly this way, although I didn't realize how dumbstruck I looked hearing all this." said the Cleo in the doorway before going back in and fading off with the box to the same wheezing sound.

Cleo turned around to ask questions with a confused look on her face, only for The Doctor to be sitting in the passenger's side of the car with his feet up on the dashboard, reclining the seat back. She walked up to the car and climbed in, and breathed a long sigh as she attempted to get her head in order.

"See? Now it's just destiny." said The Doctor. His cap rested over his face with a wide smile peeking out from around the brim. In response, Cleo reached over across him and pulled the reclining lever on the other side of the chair, violently folding up The Doctor forward into an upright position with his feet still on the dash. That simple, small measure of control put a smile on her face.

As they drove to the theatre where Cleo worked, they both sat in relative silence. Cleo was attempting to rationalize things, reconcile her entire world. So many questions were running through her, like an ocean tidal wave. The drive was not helping.

Pulling into the parking lot, she put the car into park and took a deep long sigh to try and push all of those thoughts into the back of her head. She wondered if this 'The Doctor' fellow had some words that helped put things into perspective.

"Cheeseburger salads should be a thing." said The Doctor. That would be a no, thought Cleo.

She sighed and led him inside the empty theater. On first glance he was already excited again. Was he always going to be this upbeat?

"Fascinating!" said The Doctor, with a wide grin on his face.

"What is?" said Cleo.

"Well, that one is right." said The Doctor pointing to an ancient landscape of Greece set piece. "As is that one. And that one!" he said pointing to two sci-fi landscapes. "But strangely this one is all wrong. No, it needs a bit more color. It actually looks quite accurate to a bazaar on Kryne." he said The Doctor, pointing to her landscape of Turkey.

He turned to her, "Do you already have experience travelling in space and or time? You know, I probably should have checked your resume first to get acquainted. You definitely have the job my dear but... just what is your experience?"

"Well, nothing. I just make sets for the theatre, most of which come from my head or with some help from an almanac or the tele. I'm pretty low tech, honestly..." she said,

letting her voice trail off before her embarrassment shone. No need for him to know that it's because you can't afford technology.

"Incredible! Either you have a grand imagination or all of space and time is leaking through a crack your bedroom wall through your head." he paused to take a breath, "Both of which are interesting, but only one of which I need to worry about in the near future as I've learned." he finished, letting out a nervous chuckle.

Cleo shrugged off his comment as babble. "So what can you use from here to stop an invisible train?" she asked.

"A temporal train!" said The Doctor, rummaging through a box of props.

"Gesundheit." said Cleo.

"Why thank you. Wait... No, I mean, it's travelling through time. That minute or so that I was passing you by every day? Those happened consecutively for me. I assume I might have shown up a day or a week later each time you saw me, but it was only minutes for me." said The Doctor, picking up a blank loaded single shot pistol from the early 1800s.

He aimed up towards the sky, and in an almost inaudible tone Cleo heard him sing a count from one to nine before firing it. After firing, he stared eagerly into the barrel before realizing it had fired a blank, then tossed it back into the box disappointed.

Cleo stared hard at the man. How did he do it? She asked simple questions and he would toss off some incredible detail like it was nothing and change her entire perspective on the situation. Everything just led to more questions.

Was he deliberately confusing her? Was he having a laugh at her expense? Even trying to reconcile things was a complete mess that only led to more questions. God, why did it all have to lead to more questions?

"Because no one has ever taught you to ask the right question. Take your last question for example: 'How' I am about to stop the train is irrelevant. If you must know the current number 1 solution is using gallons of acrylic structural adhesive and glue-ing the train to the tracks. But what I'd rather you did in this case is ask me 'why'; it doesn't seem to be hurting anyone, the signal is working fine to warn people and keep them safe, and it has to be easier to get onto the train while moving than stopping it, so why?" said The Doctor while walking to a dark corner with some neatly stacked boxes. They were perhaps the neatest part of the theatre in their organization.

Cleo's mouth hung open. Could he read her mi-

“No I can’t read your mind. Don’t be silly. I just know how I would feel in your situation. ‘Wild man falls from speeding train and starts rummaging through my life. All the things he says lead to more questions.’ It is simple, basic empathy. Took a while to learn that though, admittedly. You have to remember that you jumped into this adventure halfway through: details won’t make sense until the end or they weren’t really important enough to know to begin with. But trust me, you’re about to see the greatest show in the galaxy! Now... what is in this box I’m holding?” The Doctor said having walked up to her with a box from the dark corner in his hands.

“Box of utilities: industrial strength harnesses and supports that we got in for a play we never made. I believe it was Spider-man: Turn off the Dark.” said Cleo, reading the outside and thinking.

“Spider-” The Doctor began while drawing up a big smile. Cleo noticed when he smiled because he thought he was being clever that smiles tended to emanate from his eyes.

The next day The Doctor and Cleo found themselves at the same train tracks at the same time that Cleo was always there, sitting on the hood of her car with her car doors open. Cleo was thumbing through a new smartphone, picking a song.

Cleo was going to ask The Doctor where he got the money to get him a smartphone and a plan with unlimited everything, but stopped when she saw it billed to a Mr. Shkreli. Chances are he wouldn’t miss it.

“Now.” said The Doctor, looking down the tracks and squinting hard.

Cleo played her song selection, over which Megadeth’s Train of Consequences blasted over her car speakers at full volume, almost completely drowning out the train signal.

The signal went down to warn of the train’s approach. With the volume of the music nearly deafening, her mind was focused on trying not to listen to the sheer volume of the music. And because of that, she finally saw the train through what The Doctor called a perception filter.

The train sped forward on the tracks visible to Cleo, but met a web of over 200 industrial harnesses linked across both sides of the tracks by trees on each side. It attempted to rip through each one, but each line had just enough give to it to stretch and add a little more stopping power. When the train was slowed enough that The Doctor could take aim he produced his sonic screwdriver and very quickly gave the train a short pulse; which caused the wheels to come off the train and ground it permanently.

Coincidentally, his actions were in sync to the lyric “My thinking is derailed, I’m tied up to the tracks”. Cleo noted The Doctor looked pleased.

“You’re no fun, Doctor.” said a woman in the doorway of the closest train car, as if she was expecting him. She was looking at him intensely, with a long black dress and her hair in a high and tight bun. She looked oddly familiar to Cleo.

“Fun? Fun?!? Fun is posting contrary opinions on an internet message board anonymously to see who you can rile up; not getting whacked out of your mind on synthetic Ogron adrenaline, watching the entire Back To The Future trilogy, taking their idea of a time travelling train and doing it one better by making it invisible. Especially when you knock me out with a sucker punch to the back of my neck, steal my TARDIS, hook up a train to the Eye of Harmony so you can punch holes in the universe that will suck all of reality through; AND THEN MONOLOGUE ABOUT HOW COOL YOUR IDEA WAS WHILE TYING ME UP AND HOW I OUGHT TO BE HONORED TO BE A PART OF IT, YOU GODDAMNED PSYCHOPATH!” screamed The Doctor at the woman, some spittle launching out in his verbal tirade.

The Doctor paused to compose himself before finishing, “I mean, do you know how boring your speeches are when you’re out of your mind on drugs? It’s insufferable!”

The woman flipped him off in response.

“Doctor, who is this?” asked Cleo.

“Her name is The Rani; and she really sucks. She’s a brilliant scientist who specializes in Biology, Phrenology and Psychology with no morality to speak of, not even the miniscule amount I attribute to The Mas... er, another of my ilk. Let me give you an example: do you know what lobotomies are? She’s the one who introduced them to humanity. They had no true medical value, she just wanted to see how long she could convince humanity to maim each other’s brains before they wised up to it. I specifically detest this version of her; for reasons readily apparent.” said The Doctor.

“So, are you still feeling the effects of the Aphrodisiacal energy in this regeneration? I didn’t get to see you often enough to make notes of consistent results for my experiment, old friend.” said The Rani, now folding her arms and leaning against the doorway to the train. She was goading The Doctor, knowing several of his previous incarnation’s quirks were the result of The Rani interfering with the regeneration process. There wasn’t anything immoral about that to The Rani, it was just science to her.

“Thankfully no, I managed to expel that by the end. And frankly I didn’t appreciate their interference in my adventures.” said The Doctor with deep seeded frustration in his voice.

“Oh behave, Time Lord. You’re part of the most stagnant race in the Universe: gatekeepers to the order of universal boredom. How does a race with the ability to biologically change into anything they wish and only become something vaguely Time Lord shaped every single time? To a race so happily nested in their ivory towers looking down on the universe death is the only adventure you have left.” said The Rani.

Immediately The Doctor thought to object on the grounds that The Rani had only ever been human shaped as well, but was interrupted by Cleo tugging his arm.

“Doctor, I know who she looks like! Her face is exactly the same as the girl who played Aurora in Once Upon a Time.” said Cleo whispering to him. The Doctor noted this somewhere in the back of his brain for future reference.

“And I’ve already won. You see-” she produced a familiar looking long, silver handled wand and activated a pulsating blue diode with a similar sound effect on the end to demonstrate it as the same type of device as The Doctor’s.

“I have your soni-” she said before the device exploded in her hand. The explosion blasted shrapnel into her arm, burned her palm and the force of which broke bones throughout the whole appendage. Across the way The Doctor had used his current sonic screwdriver to blow it up without warning her in the middle of her monologue.

“Did you really think I didn’t notice my own screwdriver was missing just because I was regenerating? At that time I only carried that exact screwdriver and a TARDIS key! It was conspicuous in its absence! And what were you going to do with it, open the eye of harmony further while you got away scott free?” The Doctor paused to laugh maniacally; or as best a maniacal laugh as The Doctor could ever muster. Cleo noted it sounded a bit forced.

“I’ve been waiting ever since that regeneration that YOU interfered with until you would slip up and be forced to use my own screwdriver against me. And let me tell you something: you’re a hell of a biologist but you’re a terrible engineer to not have at least tried to change the password on it. My only regret is that I’m not the last me to see this happen.” said The Doctor. The Doctor soniced again and made the lights behind The Rani explode, causing her to duck from the sparks and falling glass.

“Doctor you’re scaring me.” said Cleo.

"It's just theatrics. Keep selling that fear for me." whispered The Doctor to Cleo.

The Doctor kept an intense look on his face as Cleo grabbed his arm pretending like she was trying to stop him; dragging along Cleo as he walked toward the train. The Rani screamed in fear and begged The Doctor to stay back; and as he got within striking distance she twisted a small ring on her finger desperately without looking down.

"So, 'The Rani' we've both now done some needlessly violent things and soon I won't be able say I have the moral high ground. But hey... at least I'll live to regret it." The Doctor said.

"Why? Why are you doing this to an innocent scientist? What could cause 'The Doctor' of all people to torment me so?" screamed The Rani, trying to buy time while twisting her ring.

"Au contraire mademoiselle 'The Rani': you did this to yourself" The Doctor said mocking her. He laughed maniacally again to kill time, waiting for her to find the right combination.

When she finally twisted it the way she needed to, a look of calm washed over as a familiar wheezing sound started and she disappeared without another word.

"Hey, what was that? Where'd she go? Did we want her to just disappear like that?" asked Cleo as she finally eased up her grip from The Doctor's arm.

"What she was wearing was a small, personal version of my time machine called a Time Ring. The Time Ring she was wearing is an important piece of technology from a specific universal war. It doesn't make much sense to carry around a time machine that could be damaged with no way to fix it in a fist fight, so there's a failsafe that will take her to a specific place where the proper authorities on my home planet are waiting" said The Doctor with a sly expression. He paused to chuckle for a second to himself.

"Not that she would know: she stuck her head in a lab developing biological weapons that would tear enemies and civilians indiscriminately. She has no real experience with the actual technology." said The Doctor as he climbed in the train and offered Cleo a hand up.

"But do these authorities have a proper detention for someone like her?" asked Cleo as she climbed into the train.

The Doctor let out another chuckle and produced a post-it note pad from his pocket. "Oh heavens no. Gallifrey is as effective a prison as wet tissue paper; but she'll face some justice in there. I'm not the only person who she's wronged." He said as he scribbled a

quick message and stuck it to the outside of the train. Together they walked up to the TARDIS and the Doctor yanked The Rani's handiwork out of the machine: large cables hooked to the console.

"I've designed a set that looks exactly like this." said Cleo on her first impression of the TARDIS interior. Off hand she looked at a coat by the doorway and noticed a small chihuahua puppy in one of the pockets poking his head out eagerly and smiling with his eyes.

"I noticed. We need to have a talk about that..." said The Doctor.

"Cleo. My name is Cleo." said Cleo.

"Sorry. Did I not let you introduce yourself before now? How terribly rude of me. But come in and close the door, I'll have a room made up for you in a minute. And then I need to hear all about where you think all your ideas come from and for you to describe them all. We have quite the mystery to solve and isn't that amazing?" The Doctor said while hanging his newsboy cap on a very dangerous looking weapon.

Cleo smiled and nodded; it was the first thing that made complete sense. She closed the door behind her, and with a now familiar wheezing sound The TARDIS disappeared.

A few minutes later, Kate Stewart and an entire battalion of UNIT troops rolled up and took defensive positions around the train with guns trained on every door.

After 15 minutes of waiting Kate Stewart approached the train and saw the small Post-It note in the doorway. After reading it, she handed it backwards and walked away with her head hung. Her #2 read the note aloud.

"Sorry you missed me. And about the mess. Lunch sometime? Your treat. -The Doctor." read the Exile Doctor aloud.

The Eternal Prison

by Gallifrey Immigrant

What if the Nacho Doctor had a particularly penitential tale from the pen of another writer?

Sophie Menter woke up, disoriented. She was on the floor of a dark, wet room, surrounded by other people. She attempted to move, but find her body not responding.

Looking around, she saw the Doctor on the floor. He looked hurt, with his cap askew on his head, and face grey with ash.

“Doctor, what’s going on?” asked Sophie.

Her mind was foggy...where was she? The words “Eternal Prison” drifted to mind. Straining her muscles, she tried to see where she was. A window was overhead, showing stormy cloud weather.

A feeling of dread crawled up her spine. Then, she saw the shape of a man. It walked with very faint footsteps, gingerly walking around the unconscious bodies, and toward her. It stood right above her, with an unchanging expression. Then something at the end of its arms wrapped around her neck, and squeezed--

Having said good-bye to the cat, which Sophie refused to endanger by bringing along, she quickly skipped outside the TARDIS. The Doctor had already strolled outside, and was observing the giant black cube in front of them.

The Doctor had called it “the Eternal Cage” earlier. As she saw the dark, black-glassy exterior, it made sense. No windows, no door even. Still the building didn’t seemed too odd, despite being ominous. Just a normal black building. Sophia had wondered why the Doctor seemed so nervous.

“Nervous? I’m not nervous at all. Just, this isn’t my favorite place to be,” said the Doctor. He pulled nervously at the cap on his head, while giving a broad smile. “Actually, it’s my least favorite place to be.”

“So, again, why are we here?” asked Sophie.

"I recently saw a news article about two people who got lost in here. That's very, very bad, and not because breaking-and-entering is punished harshly," said the Doctor.

"If people do something foolish like go into an 'Eternal prison', they get what they deserve," she said. The Doctor's insistence on cleaning after people's mistakes was rather maddening. Not that she couldn't understand caring for her fellow man, but it was becoming a habit.

"Menter! Have some empathy. Some places, no one deserves," said the Doctor. His jovial glance over at her changed quickly to a regretful mood. He fiddled with his jacket, and added "I'd leave you here, but the Prison rules are that two must enter--

Sophia was wrenched from her memories. The shadow loomed over her, drawing out a red liquid from purple tentacle wrapped around her neck. She felt her memories being drawn from her, as this creature searches for something. The Doctor's body laid crumbled on the floor, his mind already drained.

She concentrated, as she cannot let the Warden find the way out--

The inside of the prison looked like a castle. Weirdly, there were windows showing a sky and land that couldn't possibly be there. Gears were littered around the walls, constantly churning. The rooms lead to more rooms, and Sophie started to feel lost. The Doctor, as usual, wasn't worried. He was a, in his own words, a "holistic" thinker, after all. Sophie wasn't quite sure what that meant, but it seemed to mean "Whatever happens, I'm perfectly fine with, no matter how bad."

"The society that made this prison had a high amount of criminals. Horrible economic conditions and societal depression were leading to an all out crime wave. Or, at least that's what they said was happening. I'm of the opinion it was overblown," said the Doctor.

"Of course you would think that. You're a fool when it comes to bad people. Always far too trusting," said Sophie.

The Doctor obviously wanted to argue that point, but instead he said "Anyway, in order to deal with this crime wave, they built the ultimate prison. No one who came here could ever leave. They gathered the best memeticist, the greatest map-drawers, the utmost of puzzle-makers, and then hid the secret of the exit. They sent the prisoners in, and then they were never heard from again."

“Wait. You do know the way out, right?” asked Sophie.

“Ahem, you see—”

As they turned a corner, they encountered a man wearing armor, while holding what looked like a futuristic form of gun straight at them. The man looked utterly frightened.

“Oh, hello. I’m the--”

A blast of heat zoomed from the gun into the wall behind the Doctor.

“I am Captain Gert Bikinda. This was supposed to be a private mission for gold. Why are you here?”

Behind him, Sophie caught a glimpse of someone. A rush of fear went down her spine, for no apparent reason.

“Get away!” screamed the man pointing the gun wildly at the Doctor and Sophie. The man didn’t even seem clear about what he wanted to do with the thing, just that he didn’t want them to get close.

“Let’s try this again. I’m the Doctor, and this is Sophie,” said the Doctor.

“Are you the police?” he asked.

“No. I’m a pianist, and he’s a professional rebel” said Sophie.

“Well, that’s a way to put it. Listen, we’re here to rescue you and your friends from this place,” said the Doctor. “I think. Why exactly are you here?”

“For gold. There’s been rumors of rare metals in this area,” said Gert.

“Isn’t this place impossible to leave?” asked Sophie.

“Pfft. That’s a rumor to scare the locals,” said Gert.

“Actually, it isn’t,” said the Doctor. He tugged his cap again, and added “And this isn’t someplace you should just waltz into. Where are your friends?”

"How do I know you're not here for the gold as well?" asked Gert.

"Society still uses gold? How quaint," said the Doctor, smiling.

"Neither one of us are the type to go strolling into an unbreakable prison for some gold. The Doctor doesn't need money, and I hate being cooped up in one place," said Sophie.

That shape reappeared behind the man. Gert noticed Sophie staring, and turned around.

"Oh no," said the Doctor.

It was a creature made of purple webs, wrapped around a slender, laggard body. It had perfectly circular holes for eyes, and a perfect circle for what looked like a weird mouth orifice. Its hands ended in tentacles.

Gert blasted the creature instantly. It absorbed the blow, and made an ungodly noise, but didn't fall to the ground. Instead, it took a tentacle, and slammed Gert to the ground repeatedly.

"Sophie, we need to leave. Now!" said the Doctor. As he grabbed her arm, he added "The way to the exit is—"

Her memories cut off there. As if the Doctor had inserted a gap in her memory. The Warden unwrapped its tentacle around her neck, and approached a redheaded woman on the floor. Wrapping the tentacle around her neck, she saw the woman's eyes widen, as she was assumedly going through her own recollections.

The Doctor looked up. His eyes were bloodshot, and his face was dusty from lying on the floor. Yet he gave a small grin, the fool he was. Always the optimist.

"D...give it...it wants. Don't give it..." croaked the Doctor, before falling unconscious again. The Warden noticed him speaking, but ignored him. Sophie tried to escape while he was distracted, but her body felt lethargic, like her response was delayed. Eventually, it dropped the woman to the floor. Sophie's eyes caught the woman's, and felt a sense of recognition. As if they'd met recently.

The creature wrapped its tentacle around her neck, and squee--

Sophie, Clair, Gert and the Doctor ran down the corridor, the creature fast in pursuit.

“What is it?” asked Clair. She was part of Gert’s crew, who the Doctor and Sophie had found while running.

“Remember how I said they were keeping the prisoners in? Well, and this is an idea, I think they wanted to keep Ol’ Tentacle Hands here inside, actually. The prisoners were a food source,” said the Doctor.

Sophie noticed a reinforced door up ahead. “Look!”

They ran to the door. As they closed it behind them, Gert was yanked back. The Doctor locked the door with his sonic before anyone could stop him.

“Will it hold?” asked Sophie.

“We have to get Gert!” said Clair.

“Do you think he’s still alive?” asked Sophie. Her heart was pounding in fear. “Doctor, will it kill him?”

The Doctor paced around the room. “I’m not sure. That creature could have killed the entire crew by now. But it hasn’t. Why?”

“It needs something from us?” offered Sophie.

“Then let’s give it what it wants,” said Clair angrily. “So we can get out of here.”

“But maybe that’s what it wants. For us to show it the way out,” said Sophie.

“Top marks, Menter,” said the Doctor. “I don’t know what that creature is. But whatever it was, it was bad enough that an entire society created a prison to keep it locked up.”

“So what? We stay trapped?” asked Clair.

“I’m sure the Doctor will come up with a solution. Don’t you know the exit?” asked Sophie.

“Um....Sophie, can I take your hand for a moment? I need to do a thing,” said the Doctor.

The Doctor held her hand, and she felt something press into her mind. In a moment, it was done.

“What’d you do?” asked Sophie.

“Better if I don’t tell you. All you need to know is, trust in your best skills,” said the Doctor. Turning to Clair, he said “Be cool. I’ll come up with something. It’s usually better to relax, in these circumstances.”

“How am I supposed to relax?”

“Zen meditation helps,” offered the Doctor. Sophie rolled her eyes.

“I don’t know what that is.”

“Oh! Well, let me teach you. First--”

A loud knock on the door stopped their conversation.

“Clair! It’s me. I killed the Warden!” said Gert’s voice from across the door.

“Gert!” said Clair. Grinning, she tried to pry the door open.

“I wouldn’t do that just yet,” said the Doctor, looking troubled. “Not that you can. I sonicked that baby shut.”

The Doctor gave a wide grin at Sophie.

Clair pried the lock open. If Sophie wasn’t so worried, she would have laughed.

Clair opened the door wide. In front of her was the Warden, with his tentacle wrapped around Gert’s neck.

“Thank you, Clair,” said the Warden in Gert’s voice, while Gert’s mouth silently repeating.

“Let’s go, Cla--”

Sophie was wrenched from the memory. The Warden stared at Sophie’s, its eye-holes peering down at her.

“Why did they trap you in here?” asked Sophie. Could the creature understand her? She looked to the floor, and recognized Clair and Gert. Clair was staring into the distance, and Gert was dead. She couldn’t remember how he died.

The Warden slowly walked up to the Doctor, and wrapped a tentacle around his neck. She was surprised to find herself wishing nothing bad would happen to him. But she kept her face calm. No use showing weakness now.

“You’re looking through our memories for information on the exit, aren’t you? But I don’t have it in my mind. Think he deleted it. And I’m sure you’ve already looked at the Doctor, and you haven’t found it. Guess the man’s not as dumb as I thought,” said Sophie.

The Warden began to speak, through the Doctor. “Oh, you don’t know him at all. Do you know he was the one who brought me into here? He locked me inside, back when his form was much different.”

“You’re lying.”

The Doctor’s mouth formed into a smirk. “I’m not the one lying to you. She called me a horrible cretin, and manufactured the situation just so I would never see daylight. The Doctor is not the optimistic fool I see in your memories. The sad thing is, the Doctor thinks he can now put the crimes behind him. He didn’t even mean to come here. But the sins of the past return.”

“And what about your sins?” asked Sophie.

“Oh, darling. You don’t want to see my sins,” said the Warden, who grabbed Sophie by the neck, and squeezed--

Linzt nodded at Sophie proudly. She felt her insides flush, as this utter master at piano, looked at her with utter respect.

"I have seen many people attempt to play. Some of them are rather good. You have the potential to be the best," said Linzt. The summer breeze wafted her face, and she stared into the eyes of the man who could bring her to greatness. "But you hold yourself back. Why?"

"I don't," complained Sophie.

"Yes you do. You hold yourself back when you're with the Doctor. Even when we train, you're still rather tense. Why?" asked Linzt.

"I control my playing. I control the instrument," said Sophie.

"Perhaps that's the problem. Stop holding yourself back in fear. Let the shadow enter your mind. Let it look for the exit. And then, when it cannot find it, let it stay in there. Then let open your eyes," said Linzt.

"Thank you, sir," said Sophie. Inside, she thought that was terrible advice, but it was unwise to, as the Doctor would say, "piss a gift horse royally off." She simply smiled.

"It's what the Doctor advised me to tell you..."

Sophie's eyes snapped open. The Warden was squeezing.

She let the shadow in. She stopped fighting, and let it rush through her mind. It was her beautiful mother's singer. It saw her tears when her father died when she was barely eight years of age. It felt her jubilation when the Doctor and her went on their first travel.

And, it didn't see the exit. Then she locked it inside her mind.

And she opened her eyes again. The Doctor pushed himself off the floor, and winked at her. Then he clapped his hands, and they were outside.

"Where's the Warden?" asked Sophie.

"In your head," said the Doctor.

"WHAT?" asked Sophie.

"No, no. It's fine. In pure psychic form, it's harmless. As long as I take it out soon. Soon-ish," said the Doctor, pulling his cap.

Clair stared at the lifeless body of Gert. Her face, framed by red hair, looked forlorn.

"I'm sorry. There was never any gold," said the Doctor.

"This whole thing was my idea," said Clair. "I shouldn't have looked into those rumors."

"It's okay. Can't blame yourself," said the Doctor. Tapping his mouth, he said "You could come with us. It'd be better than getting arrested here."

Clair stared at him. "I suppose."

"Wonderful. Sophie, mind a new companion?" he asked.

"No. Been a bit boring with just you," she said. "Clair, come with me. I'll show you the TARDIS."

When Sophie came back, she found the Doctor talking to a pillar made of light. Suddenly, she felt a yanking in her head, like something was causing a headache. Splitting pain shot through her.

"Are you okay?" asked the Doctor. Quickly, he looked at the light "I'll be seeing you later."

The pillar disappeared. The Doctor steadied her, and looked into her eyes. His face wrinkled, and he said "I think the Warden inside you got annoyed by that Being I was chatting to. They're from the same planet...let me get that Warden out of you pronto."

As he walked to the TARDIS, Sophie said "Did you plan all this?"

"You know I never plan anything. I make a point not to" said the Doctor.

"You mean, like you didn't implant a false memory in my head as a plan against the Warden," said Sophie.

The Doctor turned around, his hands in his pockets. "I prefer randomness, but sometimes randomness forces one to plan. If it means anything, I'm proud of how you executed my kinda not-so-good plan."

Sophie smirked. "Proud of you too, you fool."

The Doctor grinned, and gave a thumbs-up. Sophie had no idea what that gesture meant, but nodded anyway.

And with that, the Doctor, Sophie, and Clair set out on another adventure.

Happy Birthday Son!

by Nacho

What if the Shalka Doctor returned for an emotional adventure?

The sounds of a crash woke Charlie in the middle of the night. Groggy, he turned over his shoulder and looked over at his alarm clock. It was 12:10 in the morning and he was now 10 minutes into his birthday. Another 6 hours and 15 minutes until it was time to get ready for school. I don't need this today, he had decided to himself; I wish I could just be alone.

Typically when he heard a crash around the house it tended to be his mother, Rachel. She was a single mother, which Charlie and Rachel both preferred. The man was wildly violent and visits tended to be the sort of awkward coaxing session one uses on a dog who's trapped themselves in a crawl space; goading the young Charlie into saying something around the supervising social worker that would make his mother out to be an unfit parent and take away the support payments.

For a long time that sort of arrangement worked for the both of them; as a child Charlie grew up understanding his mother's long hours and relative poverty was the cost of a relatively free life. When they spent time together it would be a comfortable weekend with ½ off delivery pizza and a marathon of tele series or 80s movies.

Rachel was always warm in his memories: she spoke in a high pitched voice and couldn't bare to see him unhappy. She wore a smile on her face at all times; and if she had problems they certainly didn't show around Charlie. She could fix anything, solve any problem and somehow she knew things before Charlie had even realized them himself. Mothers could be magical like that.

Charlie had his own sacrifices for their lifestyle: cold winter nights huddled under an electric blanket while his mother came home late to a freezing bed; late nights when Charlie would struggle and toil to keep up in school on his own without anyone to help him with his homework were mainstays of his life. His own personal freedom cost.

Still, there was never a point when Charlie didn't feel loved.

The first true cracks in Charlie's life began as Charlie was just entering secondary school. That night he was excitedly telling his mother about his first day, how his friends had changed and grown over the summer. His mother was nodding, listening and cooking a kraft dinner.

And then as she turned to bring the saucepan to the table, the entire meal fell from her hands. For the first time in his life, Charlie heard Rachel curse.

Behind the pan there was a tremor in the hand that once held in the pan, and instinctively her other hand reached out to grab it; to stop it from shaking.

The Doctor had bad news of the development: Huntington's Disease; a genetic disease that would slowly kill off brain cells inside her head. He apologized profusely to Charlie and Rachel, prescribing drugs to help as much as could be done.

As time went on, Charlie's life became a see-saw. There were days he found himself taking care of her, and days where she was well enough to take care of herself. When the bills began piling up Charlie took on a job after school.

Friends became distant and drifted away, his mother's mind slowly degrading into paranoia as time went on. Even if they didn't eventually drift apart, Charlie would eventually break ties rather than let them experience the horror of what may come from Rachel as she slowly lost control of herself.

Soon Charlie felt like he was justifying himself, fighting for the free life him and his mother had. He was covering for her illness with his father. He fended off the piteous stares from relatives at family functions. He presented the strong facade of a stable family and cut off anyone who was suspicious about Rachel's worsening condition.

Academically Charlie's grades began to slip, and extracurricular activities were put on hold as he began to spend more and more time taking care of her.

Soon Rachel found herself completely unable to work. In his senior year she found herself struggling to feed herself. Charlie eventually began taking days off from school to take care of her, which caused outright fights as she accused him of skipping school and not looking for a future.

The truth was even though he had applied to a few universities, Charlie saw very little future for himself while he had to take care of her.

And so on that midnight, as Charlie rolled over from the thump that woke him up, as he looked at his alarm clock and as he slowly turned to pull himself out from under the covers; Charlie made his birthday wish:

"I wish she would just go away so I could live my own life."

Groggy, he got up in his underwear, slipped his phone into the elastic band around his waist and stumbled half asleep down the hall. His eyelids were barely open, just enough to make out the dark shapes that inhabited the area and avoid them.

He would probably find her just fallen to the side off the bed again, and panicked as to how she got into that room. He would probably have to spend the next 30 minutes explaining it was her house before she apologized and broke down again, crying for another hour about the strain she put on him. He would probably have to put on some tea afterwards and struggle to keep his eyes open while she fell asleep before he decided it wasn't worth trying to sleep and going in for a shower. And he would probably do that tonight around midnight too.

It was a shock then to find her in the doorway to her walk in closet, light beaming down on her, laying on the ground in a pool of her own blood.

He immediately ran over and retrieved the phone from his waistband, cradling her in his arms and applying pressure to the blood running from her head with a nearby tee shirt. It was nearly soaked through already as his quaking hands just managed to get the police on the line to beg for an ambulance.

"Please, there's been an accident in my home. My mother ha-" he started.

"I'm so sorry. I thought I could... I thought." Rachel said, cradling his hand around Charlie's face.

"No no no! Please stay with me, mum. LISTEN, I need an ambulance now! Please! She's injured!" he said, tears starting to flow from his eyes. He was struggling in a panic with his attention divided between the two conversations.

It wasn't long before the ambulance arrived; but not sooner than Rachel losing consciousness. She was in critical condition from a powerful, blunt impact to the head.

Charlie rushed to get some clothes on as the ambulance loaded her up. It was all happening so fast and Charlie's head was in such a mad dash that he didn't even notice his red hands staining his clothes as he attempted to put them on. He hobbled down the hall, putting on both shoes as he went and tying them as he struggled his way towards the paramedics.

It would be okay. A nasty fall, but the paramedics had her now. It could all go back to normal soon. It wasn't too serious, maybe.

Once inside the ambulance he was given a shock blanket and reached out immediately, grasping Rachel's hand to hold. The vehicle started and seemed to shoot off like a

rocket. Around him, two paramedics and four hands seemed to blur around him, as if he was in slow motion and these people were moving at hyper speed.

They were doing their best to save her life, and all Charlie could do was hold her hand helplessly. He began to cry again, sniveling like a child. He remembered at that moment that whenever he felt this way his mother always found her way to him; whether he was at school or she was working a shift. It was like magic.

And in that moment, as the first tear fell from his face in the ambulance, he felt a miracle: she gripped his hand back.

He smiled and reached over to give her a hug. Her heart rate rose. She could feel him.

And she was unusually warm.

The paramedic pulled him off immediately. Her fever was spiking. He was told her brain could boil if she was left too long like this.

Did he do this? Did his hug and the increased blood flow...

No, that'd be silly, it was just a hug. The impact caused the blood rushing and the fever spike. But what caused the impa-

His birthday wish.

Charlie had wished for this. His eyes widened as he realized it was coming true.

He punched the wall to the ambulance behind him and a whole cabinet next to it opened up from the impact. Charlie's hand stung and in his own fury he wound up to punch a wall again. He deserved to have his hand broken. He deserved the fall, he deserved to be in the stretcher, not his mother.

A paramedic caught his fist wound up behind him and pushed him back. Now wasn't the time for anger. He screamed and struggled, before the paramedic restrained him back into the chair.

What would Rachel think of him now, his world spiraling out of control? She wouldn't want him to be falling apart like this because of that: she loved him too much to see him in such pain.

She was always so apologetic: even when she had her full faculties, little mistakes would cause her to apologize. As her condition got worse and worse she would always eventually snap back to some degree of normalcy once she saw the effect she was

having on Charlie. Just last night she had even apologized for how much time Charlie had to spend taking care of her.

So what would she think of him now?

Charlie pulled himself back together and apologized to the paramedic. His fists gripped the shock blanket, white with tension as he wrapped himself in the hug of the fabric.

As they got to the hospital Charlie sprinted to keep up with the stretcher being rushed to the emergency room only to have his arm grabbed by a surgeon and walked calmly to a waiting lobby.

There, in the twilight of the morning he was alone with his thoughts for at least an hour. He sat in a chair and got restless. He paced the room and got tired. He read a magazine and was revolted by the smiling faces. He turned on the tele and was furious with the late night infomercials' cheery demeanor. He looked out the window and the world seemed to have stopped.

"I wished for this." he admitted to himself again.

He sat back down in the chair and put his head in his hands. He pressed his palms into his eyes, his head shaking with tension. He screamed in anguish, he couldn't keep it in anymore.

The attending physician was in the doorway. He apologized for the interruption, which caused Charlie to look up. He explained that Rachel's fall caused what's known as Crush Syndrome. Normally it was a serious, but manageable condition that he had acted quickly enough to save; but her Huntington's was complicating the treatment.

The different medicines used to treat the different conditions would have no guarantee of success and even if they did, one might make the other worse. Either way, every solution seemed to be a death sentence, the question was how long?

Charlie's anger softened. He was completely helpless now. He begged. Wasn't there another way? Anything?

The physician assured Charlie there wasn't. He gave Charlie a few minutes to consider the options, but suggested it was time to let go so she could be herself before one condition or another took her.

And Charlie paced the room again as soon as the physician left. He could have punched that physician.

Kill her. No. That's... that's my...

When he came back Charlie was still pacing. He was about to start screaming again. The physician on the other hand was smiling.

He had a solution. He had a miracle! A new, experimental treatment recommended by a Doctor that could not only save her life, but could reverse and heal her Huntington's. It was a birthday miracle.

Charlie cut him off there. He ripped whatever clipboard was in the physician's hands and signed wherever he needed to immediately. The damage could be reversed. He could have a future and his family back. Even if he had to pay for it the rest of his life, this was the miracle he needed.

As the physician left with the forms, a man walked into the room and sat next to Charlie. As he passed through the door he gently guided it back to the frame as if handling a child. His demeanor was terribly serious, but compassionate. His clothes were victorian, almost gothic and his face.... It kind of looked like the drunk bloke from Withnall and I.

"So, here for business or pleasure?" asked the man.

"Who walks into a hospital for pleasure?" asked Charlie, not sure if he should be offended.

"People who like hospital cafeteria food." answered the man. Charlie was actually deeply offended by the remark, but couldn't help smiling.

"It's 3:30 in the morning. Cafeteria's closed." said Charlie.

"Is it? Well... Who would I be to judge someone who would wake up for 3:30 in the morning for a hospital cafeteria breakfast?" the man said with a cheeky smile. Despite the off-putting remark and the severity of the situation Charlie couldn't help but find his humor infectious.

"And just who are you anyways?" asked Charlie.

"I am The Doctor." said the Doctor.

"Charlie, nice to meet you. What are you a doctor of, exactly?" said Charlie, putting out his hand to shake. The Doctor ignored his question.

"Oh! You must be Rachel's son. Pleasure to meet you. How is she?" asked The Doctor.

“She’s...Well... I’m sorry, how do you know her?” asked Charlie, deflecting the question with another question. The Doctor ignored this question too. It was becoming a bit like tennis.

“Tell me, what’s she being treated for?” asked The Doctor, his eyes now showing some sadness and urgency despite being calm.

“Crush syndrome an-” began Charlie before being cut off.

“Yes. Yes I see. One interferes with the other. That’s a shame but at least- No. Wait. what did you consent to? Hm?” asked The Doctor, now with panic in his voice.

“Well the physician mentioned an experimental procedure that could fix everything, even the Huntington’s. I signed for that.” Charlie’s voice lifted in tone, hopeful.

“Oh.” said The Doctor looking at his watch and then getting an expression of powerful fury for split second. Then, in a blink it changed again: in his eye there was a complex emotion, hope draining out of them like water through a sieve. Finally, a second later he saw the face steel into composure, stone-like and serious. Still, through it a tear welled in one eye. This was the last expression he saw on The Doctor’s face.

“Again, pleasure to meet you.” The Doctor said as he stood up, looking at the ground and walked out of the room.

Behind him, the door slammed without the gentle guidance this “The Doctor” person had displayed earlier. The bang echoed in Charlie, and briefly questions floated up in his mind that pulled him out of his situation.

Who was that man? Was he so powerful as to have such great control over himself? Where was he going? And why wasn’t he more pleased at knowing she would be saved?

Charlie never saw him again, and spent the rest of his life after that night asking more questions about that bizarre episode than any moment that had occurred before or afterward.

After a time that felt like either a few minutes or a few days, the physician came through with a wide smile on his face. The operation was a success. His mother was recovering in intensive care, and if Charlie wanted he could see her.

Charlie asked what exactly the procedure did to fix her conditions; and he explained that the surgery hooked her lower brain functions to a machine that she would have to have

with her forever. This machine would regulate function and stop the huntingtin protein from attacking her brain; and in the process give rejuvenation to affected areas.

It was fascinating, according to the physician as they walked down the hall towards her, because Rachel had produced an unusually successful result in her surgery. He explained that in most cases, the surgery caused such an intense initial discomfort that patients were hit with an all consuming sensation of Pain; which was normally all they could express initially.

But in Rachel's case, the higher brain was having a sort of overriding thought that overpowered the powerful sensations in her body. It was as if something in her will was stronger than any other case they had dealt with.

At the door to her recovery room, Charlie and the physician both paused with Charlie taking a deep, audible breath. The physician was explaining something that Charlie truly wasn't listening to. Mentally, he was preparing to apologize for all the mistakes he'd made, all the pain he had caused her. He was preparing to tell Rachel how much he loved her and how much she meant to him. It was important to tell her now; with her in her right mind and as close to safe as possible so she could recover properly.

After a second or two he walked through the door and entered the room. Inside was a bare room, nothing on and an empty bed. Could she have left? Was she looking for him already?

"Haaaaaaaapppyyyyyy biirrrrrrrthday sssssson." said a metallic voice from behind a curtain by the bed.

The looming figure stepped into the light. Attached to a hanging IV drip and some convoluted machinery was a figure standing straight as a board with a white sock over her face and cut outs for eyes and mouth. Over those cut outs was a mesh that Charlie couldn't see through blocking the eyes and mouth. In the center of her chest cavity was a delicate looking, clunky mechanical apparatus that Charlie had a hard time describing.

"What on Mondas is going on?" asked Charlie, shocked and horrified.

The physician's eyes were wide open. He had had a revelation: her higher brain functions; her love for her son... that was the key to overriding the pain sensation. If they were able to control the higher brain function, focus thoughts on one thing so as to ignore pain then the procedure could be perfected. It was a miracle!

“IIIIIIIIII loveeeeeeee yyyyyyyyou, Charlie” the Cyberman said walking forward with it’s arms out, reaching to hug Charlie. Charlie stood paralyzed, his mind a twisted cacophony of horror and anger.

The physician used a word to describe her, a word that was one of the last things to pierce Charlie’s state of shock: Cyberman.

No... this was what remained of Rachel? This gauze and metal covered monstrosity of metal and wires? This is what amounted to saving her life?

Her face, her hands, her beating heart... it was just gone. They had made her a monster. No...he. Charlie had wanted and signed for this. Charlie had done all this. He had killed his mother and made her into a monster on his birthday. He had taken away any quiet dignity death would have given her and now wasn’t even able to look upon him with her own eyes.

Charlie hated himself.

Charlie’s instincts kicked in. He ducked around the Cyberman’s arms and ran out of the room. He ran out of the hospital. He sprinted home on pure adrenaline all the way back to his house, some miles away. He ran straight for Rachel’s room and collapsed on the floor where he had held her, the pool of blood now drying.

There he sobbed. He sobbed alone, shaking with fury and unable to accept reality. His hands over his eyes, now red and raw with tears and aggravated with deep, labored breaths.

In the closet he stared at the whole scene, horrified. He finally saw a step stool, which he assumed Rachel had been standing on. And in the corner of the closet by the doorway he saw what Rachel had been standing on the ladder for: a wrapped birthday present.

In one small corner there was dried blood that had soaked into the wrapping paper; and Charlie couldn’t bring himself to tear the wrapping, very carefully peeling the tape so as to leave the wrapping shell as undisturbed as possible.

Charlie opened the box inside slowly, tears dropping onto the outside of the bare box. An envelope caught his eye first. It was addressed to him from a university: an acceptance letter. Also in the present was a framed picture of Rachel holding the newborn Charlie with a handwritten note on the frame, “To your future. Happy Birthday, son.”

Framing Story: Part 8

All Epilogue

by Neo

Gwen watched Jack eject the last tape from the set of nine. He placed it back its case, then turned to look at her, silently.

Gwen met his expectant eyes with a roll of her own, then made her way over to the brick walls to see if there were finally any kind of openings, ways to their missing teammates. She didn't find any. She got down on her knees and poked around the floor, searching for anything that might have unhatched, but found nothing but the discarded tapes her and Jack had already watched. The place was beginning to look like a bit of sty with those strewn around on the floor.

"How many more then, do you think?" she asked.

"Just the one, I should think," said Jack, holding up a tape. "See, look at the title - Epilogue."

"So that's it then, one more tape and we find our mates? We remember everything?"

"Gwen, have you noticed anything strange about these tapes?"

"Strange?" Gwen laughed. "What hasn't been strange? They've all been absolutely mad."

"The tapes?"

"Yes, the tapes, what else? The videos."

Jack grimaced.

"Oh, don't give me that face. After this epilogue tape, do we find our mates, or do you finally explain what's going onto me?"

"I'll explain later."

"Gone back to sulking, have we? Oh, play the tape already. Let's have an ending to things."

Epilogue

(The events of which were transcribed by Nacho)

by Nacho

What if RTD read Shit Trips?

RTD sat eagerly at his computer, a wide grin peeking out proudly from his current Brigadier-like 70's porn 'stache. Dragging his trackball mouse over and clicking; there was a certain amount of satisfaction to his latest accomplishment: his latest and final contribution to the Doctor Who universe was a mirror of his very first.

A prose story, one that made a sweeping contribution to Doctor Who's legacy in the very same way his first one had. He reflected for a minute on that first story, *Damaged Goods*; and how after submitting it people in the various internet communities had clamoured for him to be the one to revive Doctor Who.

That was in the past now, and beside his keyboard lay the future: two volumes of Doctor Who fanfiction, entitled *Shit Trips*. They had personally been printed out by Davies and he had read every single story. The future was in good hands.

Patting the copies on his desk, he pulled up the manuscript he had just digitally sent in: a novelization of *Rose*; his first Doctor Who episode. That story had changed Doctor Who's lore forever, weeding out elements, keeping some and being deliberately vague on certain extended universe aspects so fans could enjoy the show on multiple levels.

And as a nod to the future was now canonized in his book: one of the opening stories of *Shit Trips* had gotten referenced as a future incarnation of The Doctor.

It would have been a fine way to cap off the perfect career in Doctor Who, had the following not taken place.

As he marveled at his work, his assistant anxiously approached with some routine news and figures for the day, casually tossing out that a new volume of *Shit Trips* was in the works; this time having a theme of alternate universes.

Davies smiled. That level of deep universe building was exactly what he had hoped from them. His assistant fidgeted nervously with the papers as he spread out the details.

The compilation was ambitious; there was even a new story involving the Doctor that Davies had just written about in his Rose novelization.

Davies began to take notice of his assistant's growing unease and questioned him about it.

It turns out, the continuity of stories had crossed over Davies' continuity nod in the novelization of Rose with Paul Cornell's Shalka Doctor; canonizing him once more after the episode Rose had initially de-canonized that incarnation.

A worried look crossed RTD's face as he attempted to check and see if he could undo the manuscript sending; perhaps he could undo all this if his internet was lagging.

After a second, Davies came to terms with the decision: there was no pulling back the email.

"And so, my first showrunner decision has been mirrored in my last..." said Davies solemnly.

He raised his head and looked toward the sky, his fists clenched in rage. RTD let out one mighty scream in agony, exclaiming "CORNEEEEEELLLLLLLLLLLLL!"

Framing Story: Part 9

I Was Much Better Off as a Coward

by Neo

“That...was...”

“Yeah.”

“Well, it’s over now, isn’t it? We watched the epilogue.”

“Did we?”

“What?”

“What did you say we did?”

“Watched the epilogue. That’s the label on the tape. You were the one acting like that meant it was the last one, but I don’t see any doors opening up, so I assume you’re about to start explaining absolutely everything.”

“Okay. You want to remember your teammates? You want to remember Tosh, to remember Owen? Well, your memories should still be in your mind, you just need something to draw them out. I can do that.”

“So you remember them then?”

“I never forgot them.”

“Why didn’t you say so earlier?”

“I needed you to remember.”

“But I don’t remember, that’s the point,” said Gwen. Try as she might, she couldn’t remember anything of Tosh except for the message that had greeted them upon entering this room, and all she remembered of Owen was that he was a man who had been in this room. Until he wasn’t.

“Listen, I’ll tell you about them and that should help draw out your memories. The more you remember about them, the sooner we can find them, and the sooner we can get out of here.”

“No more tapes?”

“We watched the epilogue, didn’t we? Forget the tapes for now. Before I tell you about Owen and Tosh, you need to keep in mind...look, let me set things up.”

Jack started to tell a story about how he’d encountered a death cult in Japan that seemingly had nothing directly to do with Tosh, let alone Owen, before telling a story about her specifically. Then he did the same for Owen, telling what sounded like an unrelated anecdote about his run-in with a gang of nihilists before launching into a story directly about their forgotten teammate. Memories twiggled for her as he did so. Half-remembered conversations. Faces she could almost picture. But it wasn’t enough. The stories about Owen and Tosh didn’t involve her or Jack, but the other stories Jack kept telling were all about him.

“Why do you keep doing that?”

“What?”

“Telling a story before telling the actual story. It’s confusing me.”

“I told you, I’m setting things up.”

“Well it makes the actual stories I asked to hear seem smaller when you keep putting your stuff before them.”

“Would you rather watch more tapes instead?”

“Tosh said if we watched enough tapes we’d be able to find her and be allowed to leave. So, yeah, I’d rather watch more tapes then listen to you keep talking about yourself.”

“What would you rather do?”

“You’ve been a right proper arse today Jack Harkness. You heard me - I would rather watch more tapes then listen to your prattling. Look,” she said, scooping up a dozen or so tapes from the shelves around her without looking at the titles, “we’ll watch these. You sit down. We’re getting through these, we’re finding our mates, then we’re getting the fuck out of here, alright?”

“What are we going to do with the tapes Gwen?”

“Watch them!”

Gwen was determined not to dwell on Jack’s attitude as the tape she’d inserted at random started to play.

Transmission

Or:

ERIMEM in an exciting adventure with the
worlds of STAR TREK and BLAKE'S 7

Or:

It's a crossover, but really only because
some Federation gets mentioned a lot, and
to be fair they had one of those in proper
DOCTOR WHO too

by Bottle Universe

*What if Erimem crossed over with the worlds of Star Trek and Blake's 7, in a
tale penned by a published Erimem author?*

Author's Note: This story is based on one of the pitches I submitted to Thebes Publishing's Erimem range in 2015. Although the first, "Serpent's Child" was accepted, this story (then titled "Deathship") was rejected. Hardly surprising, really, given how Erimem-lite the whole thing is. Oh well, it was fun to write it up as a sort of path-not-taken bit of experimentation. Enjoy!

Anopheles slipped out of hyperdrive like an armoured lobster. Two pincer-like arms extended outwards from the front of the scow, reaching out into the deep, dark void.

On the ship's cramped and dimly lit bridge, TechOP Belmont felt his ears popping. *Anopheles'* reactor core was on the verge of falling to pieces, and was guaranteed to provide its passengers with a bumpy ride when passing across the hyper-real space threshold. Making a mental note to bring the problem to the attention of his superiors back in Federation Space, Belmont began to draft a data-stream to his wife.

Anopheles, along with her skeleton crew of Belmont and Rynhart, the conn officer, had been collecting and recycling Deep Void debris for the past eight months. The waste, deposited by long range cruisers and experimental void-slicers, was a hazard to shipping and travel throughout mapped space. *Anopheles*, with its sophisticated detector dish and nuclear furnaces, was the ideal craft for locating and combusting these hazards. It was hardly the most glamorous job in the universe, but it kept the credits coming in. That was all anybody could ask for, really.

After trying and failing to come up with an appropriate opening, Belmont cancelled the data-stream and returned his attention to the control panels which dominated three of the flight deck's walls. He spidered his long, pale fingers across the gunmetal surface until he found the communication's circuit. He depressed a button before directing his gaze towards a nearby tele-viewer screen. On the grainy display Belmont could just about make out the smear of his colleague. He watched as Rynhart dragged his scarecrow frame over to the bleeping comm-station to return the call.

'What's... what's, uh, wrong?' stammered Rynhart. Despite his mastery of Deep Void navigation - or so he liked to tell everyone, at any rate - Rynhart had never quite managed to master the art of conversation. The navigator had, as Belmont had often considered, a worrying tendency to stumble through his dialogue like a lopsided gazelle.

'There's nothing wrong,' explained Belmont, reclining a little more into the bridge's plexi-leather flight chair. 'We crossed the threshold back into normal space a few minutes ago.'

'Then, uh, what's the problem?'

Belmont projected a starmap onto the micro-monitor nestled in the wall near Rynhart's comm-station. 'I'm detecting a buildup of heavy metals and atomic residue somewhere within a radius of one light year. It could be something big, but I'm going to need your help to pinpoint it exactly.'

'Why... why not just ask SySTEM to... to map the debris field?'

SySTEM was the third and final member of the *Anopheles* staff, not that Belmont liked to think of the computer as a crewmember. Although SySTEM integrated organic components, specially grown to give it the edge, Belmont struggled to think of the computer as anything more than a mass of circuits and logic gates. But he was grateful for its assistance in maintaining the scow's life support systems, and for easing them in and out of hyperdrive with a minimum of discomfort. Still, the idea of fusing biology with technology set his teeth on edge. SySTEM's uncanny, murmuring syntax was uncanny.

'I'm not sure that she'd be able to get a lock.'

There's really no need to underestimate me, Belmont, said the computer, feigning hurt feelings. I'm capable of telling the tiniest protons apart at a distance of two and a half light years. Every SySTEM computer intelligence comes with a guarantee of absolute consumer satisfaction, not to mention a five decade warranty. Upgrade tod-

'Fine,' said Belmont, cutting off SySTEM's melodic drawl. 'If you're so good, get me a fix on that debris cluster.'

I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I can't do that.

Rynhart's voice staccatoed from the other end of the comm channel. 'Wh- why not?'

It's really quite simple, Rynhart, murmured the AI. I was programmed to operate within the parameters of a Federation refuse scow. I'm not authorised to perform scans on vessels that still contain active lifesigns.

Belmont furrowed his brow. 'What do you mean, active lifesigns?' *Anopheles* was out in the depths of space, months away from any of the Federated Worlds. The odds of them encountering another ship, one actually containing a crew, were astronomically low. There were no other lifeforms out this far.

I mean exactly what I said, Belmont. I'm detecting a vessel at the limit of my scanner range, and there's something alive inside it.

'So- some kind of, uh, *alien*?'

In his mind, Belmont tried to summon up a list of First Contact Protocols. He recalled a lot of bullet points about not launching unprovoked attacks, and several more about the importance of decontamination protocols before and after contact. He seemed to remember something else about a policy of non-interference, but couldn't be sure if he'd just made that up. It would be convenient, after all, if there was some footnote in the Galactic Federation's charter that would allow them to turn around and hyperdrive in the opposite direction.

But he was a scientist, wasn't he? The prospect of discovering the new and unexplored should excite him, not make him want to run away with his tail in between his legs. He hadn't spend his adolescence training to work a garbage run; he'd wanted to be out on the science vessels and hyperdrive laboratories. An encounter with the mysterious vessel - whatever its origins - might actually let him live out those boyhood fantasies for

real. Not to mention that shaking tentacles with a kaleidoscope amoeboid would give him something to write about in his data-stream.

‘Rynhart,’ he said. ‘Get up here and lay in a course for that ship. We’re going to find out what’s really going on.’

I really don’t think you should do that, Belmont. I’m not equipped with the diplomatic protocols required for First Contact scenarios.

‘I’m sure you’ll manage,’ said Belmont, giving the console a reassuring pat.

I really don’t know, droned SySTEM. There’s something very strange about that ship, Belmont. I can feel it. I can feel it.

Rynhart was on the flight deck now, nursing a medicinal flask of Adrenaline and Soma. The prospect of meeting with an entirely new alien species was apparently providing a challenge for his already malnourished social skills.

Not that the navigator was alone in his distrust of the mysterious ship. Belmont had been forced to plot *Anopheles*’ course manually after SySTEM had refused to have any part in it. The AI was continuing to murmur tidings of doom, making the ship that was now drawing closer and closer out to be some kind of eldritch grotesque. Belmont, who put the computer’s trepidation down to poor programming, had eventually just muted SySTEM’s auditory output in order to get some peace and quiet.

Now he was gulping down the last of his raktajino and inputting the final computations to bring them within range of the alien ship. *Anopheles*, despite its age, was outfitted with a short range teleport. Once the scow was alongside the vessel, he and Rynhart would be able to transport over. But first, he would have to tell SySTEM what they were planning.

There really is something very strange about that vessel, Belmont, said the computer, once the techOP had plucked up the courage to unmute it.

‘You mean because it’s an alien craft?’

On the contrary. It’s an Earth vessel.

‘What do, uh, you mean, an “Earth vessel”?’

That's what's so strange about it, Rynhart. From what I can tell, no ship of that design has been launched for over five hundred years. I've made a check of the historical records. It's called *Wanderer Twelve*.

Belmont made an effort to recall his history. The Wanderer ships had been deep space cryostasis craft, meant to carry their crews in suspended animation from one part of the galaxy to another. Two dozen had been launched in the years before the Earth Authorities had officially encountered extraterrestrial life, but few had ever reached their intended destinations. *Wanderers One-through-Nine* had been discovered since, their cryostasis units fried and their crewmen dessicated. If *Wanderer Twelve* was reading as occupied, Belmont and Rynhart might be about to stumble on a trio of astronaut who hadn't been woken up in half a millenia. But how could they still be alive, after all those years? Why hadn't the batteries failed, or the systems fused? The reactor was leaking deadly radiation; why hadn't *Wanderer Twelve's* crew succumbed to that?

Too many unanswered questions, and they'd remain without answers until he boarded the ship. Donning a teleport bracelet, and telling Rynhart to do the same, Belmont felt the world around him dissolve into a shower of dynamon crystals as the transport began. But even as the dingy interior of *Anopheles'* teleport bay faded from view, Belmont could still hear the murmur of SySTEM's voice.

Wanderer class vessels used sublight drives, Belmont, droned the AI. There's no way that *Wanderer Twelve* could have ended up this deep in space, even after all of that time. So the real question is, who put it here for us to find?

Belmont took a deep breath in through his nose and instantly regretted it. The interior of the cryostasis vessel smelt like the inside of an old can of tuna. There were other scents too: engine oil and reactor exhaust fumes, leaking coolant, and something that smelled like rotting cinnamon.

He switched on his flashlight and directed the beam further down the corridor where they'd materialised. The light flickered off rusting control panels and cracked tele-viewer displays. Rynhart was further down the hexagonal corridor, making observations of his own.

'This place has seen better days,' Belmont remarked, running a finger across a dusty switchboard. 'This place must have been the nerve centre of the whole operation. Everything from the cryostasis functions to the replicator units was controlled from here.'

‘By, uh, something like SySTEM?’

‘A far more primitive model, but the analogy holds,’ he replied. ‘Those old computer systems were why most of these missions failed. With no one to maintain them during the flight, the software just degraded to the point of uselessness. No computer means no cryostasis means no life.’

‘But if... but if this computer failed... why, uh, are we picking up lifesigns?’

Belmont checked the screen of his compu-pad for the source of the lifesign. It was several hundred metres further down the length of this ship, growing fainter with every passing moment. If they were going to enact a daring rescue, they would have to get a move on.

Several minutes later, Belmont discovered the source of the lifesign pulse. To his surprise, he and Rhynhart had not come face to face with a bug eyed monster. Even without the aid of the compu-pad’s medical scanner, it was clear to both men that their discovery was a human being. She was dressed in clothes of a style that Belmont recognised from the Federation historical archives, and had a short bob of dark hair. On one olive-coloured finger sat a glittering ring.

‘I... I don’t like this,’ said Rhynhart. ‘It doesn’t make any, any sense.’

‘There’s nothing to worry about,’ Belmont reassured him. ‘She’s no risk to us. She’s out cold.’

The woman’s eyes snapped open.

She shot up from the grimy floor, backed up against a bulkhead, staring at her two would-be rescuers with fierce, bloodshot eyes. She glanced down at her hands in horror, and then back up again at Belmont. ‘The infection,’ she rasped, in an accent that the techOP couldn’t quite place. ‘The infection... it cannot be allowed to be transmitted. I will not allow it... it will be... must be... stopped...’

She collapsed back onto the floor with a metallic clunk.

Belmont could see Rynhart out of the corner of his eye, shaking like a leaf. He could hardly blame him. Finding a ghost ship was one thing, but this was quite another. He was having trouble processing it all.

‘Wh- what do we do with her?’ demanded Rynhart, through chattering teeth. Suddenly the interior of the cryoship seemed uncannily cold. A floating tomb, adrift in space.

Belmont pulled back the sleeve of his dark blue overalls and fingered his teleport bracelet. He raised the device to his mouth. 'SySTEM, can you hear me?'

The AI's drone crackled back across the void. *I can hear you, Belmont.*

'Good. We need a teleport out of here, now. For three humans.'

I'm sorry, Belmont, but I just can't allow that.

He gritted his teeth. 'What the hell's that supposed to mean? I've got a civilian here who requires urgent medical care. Get me that teleport!'

I'm sorry, but the regulations are clear on the subject of transmitting unscreened individuals aboard Federated starships. The risk of contagion-

'I don't care about that,' he insisted, crouching down to cradle the woman's head. There were thin, spidery lines of blue-black crisscrossing her epidermis. Belmont examined them closely. Could this be the infection that she'd mentioned? He couldn't know for sure until he'd had a chance to examine her aboard *Anopheles*. If only that damn computer...

Are you willing to take full responsibility in the case of anything going wrong? SySTEM asked. The regulations allow for a temporary override of my logic centres, if the crew deem such an action necessary.

Belmont paused, inhaled deeply. 'Do it,' he said. 'Now.'

His vision dissolved into dynamon flakes.

Belmont had, with SySTEM's aid, synthesised a cocktail of drugs and administered them to the mystery woman. Already her symptoms were reducing: the spidery blackness was fading, and her heart rate and blood pressure were beginning to stabilise.

Belmont and Rynhart had waited in the *Anopheles*' cramped medical bay for the woman to wake. Fifteen minutes after the teleport was completed, her eyes snapped open.

She yelped and leapt backwards off the bio-bed, stalking around it, careful to keep the obstacle between her and the crewmen at all times. Belmont couldn't say that he blamed her. Disorientation was to be expected. Aggression was a typical response to stressors.

'My name is Samuel Belmont,' he said, hoping that the scow's translator-nanobots would make his speech decipherable for her. 'This is the deep space refuse collector Anopheles. We found you on a derelict and bought you over to our ship for treatment. Do you remember any of that?'

The woman's expression softened. 'You saved my life. Thank you.'

'Who... who are you?' asked Rynhart. 'How did you get here?'

'I am a traveller in time,' said the woman, in such a matter-of-fact tone that it took Belmont a few moments to realise that she'd said anything so outrageous. 'My name is Erimem. I was a god among my own people, a pharaoh.'

Pharaoh. The word stirred a few memories of Pre-Industrial History seminars in Belmont's brain. Some kind of royal figurehead? But there hadn't been pharaohs for thousands of years.

But if this woman really was a time traveller, that wouldn't matter, would it?

'But, uh,' mumbled Rynhart, 'the people of that era didn't have access to time travel tech. I'd have... have heard about it from somewhere.'

Erimem nodded. 'I only know that I was taken through time by my enemies. Before that...' she trailed off. 'Before that, the memories are hazy. I remember distant stars and terrible creatures but there is some kind of block. Something is preventing me from accessing those memories.' She smiled self consciously. 'It is a very long story. Suffice to say that I vanquished my enemies and took their travel technology.' She glanced down at the ring around her finger. 'I am searching for my past – I was searching for it when I arrived in your time.'

There was long pause as the two men considered her story. Unperturbed by their confusion, Erimem continued, 'I would not lie to you. I really do come from another time, another place. I arrived in the deathship quite by accident.'

'Deathship,' repeated Belmont, seizing upon her ominous turn of phrase, 'you know where it came from, then. You know what it's doing so far out in Deep Void. You might even know what happened to the crew.'

'You are correct,' said Erimem. She swung her long legs down from the bio-bed and crossed the room towards Belmont. Out of the corner of his eye, the navigator could see Rynhart taking a nervous step back. Apparently no amount of bio-scans could convince him that Erimem didn't pose a threat. That was hardly surprising, all things considered. Rynhart's jumpiness had been the reason he'd been refused admittance into the Space

Security Service, one of the reasons why he was now hauling scrap rather than foiling Dalek invasion gambits.

‘Then what did happen?’

Erimem explained. After her materialisation aboard the derelict, she had searched for clues as to her location. She’d accessed the ship’s flight logs, only to discover that something was very, very wrong.

‘When I watched the logs,’ she explained, ‘I learnt that the Wanderer craft had been attacked during its voyage, centuries ago. The crew had little recollection of the experience – a condition that I cannot help but sympathise with – but they were sure of one thing. Their attacker had introduced a disease into their bodies.’

Belmont nodded. ‘Biological warfare, I see. Infect the crew of the Wanderer and they carry the disease to any other ships they come into contact with. The technique is an old one.’

‘And a, uh, deadly one,’ said Rynhart. ‘We need... we need to warn someone about this. It’s a, uh, a shipping hazard. A danger to public health. It’s, ah, a prelude to invasion.’

‘I do not think so,’ said Erimem. ‘The deathship was infected many centuries ago. The force that did so may have died out or moved on in that time. I doubt very much that they mean to move against the Earth.’

‘Nonetheless, he’s right,’ Belmont replied, making his way to the door of the med-bay. ‘We do need to warn the Federation Council about this.’

‘How... how do we know that we’re not already infected?’ demanded Rynhart. ‘We were on that ship. We might be already, uh, we might already be dying even as we speak.’

Belmont input a command into a nearby control panel. ‘SySTEM, can you give me a reading on any foreign contaminants in the bloodstreams of the people in this room? Viruses, pathogens, bacteria, anything like that. Anything that shouldn’t be there.’

There was a pause as the computer’s logic centres processed the information. Negative. I am reading negative on any health threats, Belmont. You are free to leave the isolation zone and return to your normal duties.

‘You’re, uh, you’re sure?’

Positive. No SySTEM computer brain has ever distorted information or provided dishonest answers. You can rest assured that the contagion, whatever its origin, has been treated completely by the vaccine created by myself and TechOP Belmont.

Belmont nodded and headed out into the corridor, aware that he was being followed not only by his colleague but also by Erimem. She was staring at control panels and venting systems as she passed them, apparently trying to glean as much information as possible from even the most mundane of features. Her curious eyes continued to roam over the interior of *Anopheles* until the trio reached the debris scow's flight deck.

Belmont turned to Erimem. 'The communications equipment in here is a few decades out of date, but it'll transmit the mayday sure enough. They built this stuff to last.' He slouched down in the nearest chair and began to operate the communication console. A few moments later a frown began to crack across his features.

'What is wrong?' demanded Erimem, sensing his unease. She squatted down beside the console. The light from the screen flickered across her bronzed complexion.

'Rynhart, come and look at this for me, won't you?' asked Belmont, turning to the navigator. 'I can't get into the network. It's like my access protocols have been overridden.'

'That's, uh, impossible,' said Rynhart. 'There's, uh, no way... Here, let me have a go...'

Belmont moved away from the console to let his colleague through, gesturing to Erimem to do the same. She assented, scrambling over to the other side of the room.

'Why do you not ask your... SySTEM to transmit the message?' she demanded, as Rynhart continued to tinker with the equipment panel. She cleared her throat. 'SySTEM machine. Send the message that we require. Now, please,' she added, for fear of sounding impolite.

There was no response.

Belmont shook his head. 'You don't have the proper voice-print clearance,' he explained. 'SySTEM, this is Belmont. What's your status?'

Silence.

'That's, uh, strange,' murmured Rynhart, pausing for a moment in his labour.

The communication console exploded in a shower of sparks and melted plastic.

Rhynhart caught the brunt of the explosion, letting out a screech as the discharge of energy rattled through his nervous system. He let out one final whimper before collapsing face-first onto the damaged console.

'SySTEM!' demanded Belmont. 'What the hell was that? What just happened?' He tried to control his breathing. SySTEM was supposed to prevent equipment failures like that from occurring. Any potential for an explosion should have been identified and corrected. It just didn't make sense. Unless...

'I am afraid,' said Erimem, summing up Belmont's thoughts better than he could, 'that your SySTEM machine has developed a mind of its own.'

'That's impossible,' spat Belmont, trying not to look at Rynhart's charred body. 'The SySTEM computer has a thousand failsafes. It needs to, to help coordinate the organic components...' He trailed off in horror. 'Organic components. The contagion. It's infected SySTEM, taken over the ship's systems.'

'In that case,' suggested Erimem, edging towards the corridor. 'I suggest that we leave this place now.'

The flight deck plunged into darkness.

Belmont and Erimem stumbled down the dimly lit corridor in the direction of the *Anopheles*' engine room. Breathlessly, Belmont explained to Erimem that the engineering section was cut off from SySTEM's coordination. They would be safe there, for a while at least. Until SySTEM realised where they had gone and began to disable the ship-wide life support functions. Belmont knew that it was tracking them through the interior of the scow, the dozens of security cameras and heat sensors transmitting data to the fever-stricken computer core.

Anopheles gave a shudder and Belmont stopped in his tracks. 'We're moving,' he said softly. 'SySTEM has overwritten our current flight path. We're crossing the hyper-real space threshold.'

'Although I do not pretend to understand what any of that means,' Erimem whispered, 'I think I know enough to say that it is not good news.'

Belmont nodded. Away from the flight deck he had no way of calculating their new destination, but he had an uneasy feeling that they might be moving towards Earth. He explained his theory to Erimem. '*Anopheles* has a hyperdrive. That means that we can

drop in and out of a layer of subspace where interstellar travel occurs at many times the speed of light.

‘The problem,’ he continued, as they arrived outside of engineering ‘is that *Anopheles*’ engine is one of the older models. It isn’t well enough engineered to make the trip to Earth at this speed, not without going into a critical overload. That would blow the ship to pieces.’

They entered the engine room and Belmont directed Erimem towards the reactor controls. She examined the array of levers and switches with a look of bemusement, before turning back to Belmont.

‘I am very sorry,’ she said after a moment of silence. ‘I am very sorry about what happened to your friend. He did not deserve to die.’

Belmont snorted. ‘Who does? He went out the way he’d always wanted to: trying to save the Solar System from an alien invasion.’

‘But I am still sorry.’

‘Yes,’ said Belmont quietly. ‘And Rhynhart is still dead. We will be too, if we don’t stop this ship before it reaches Earth.’ He began to manipulate a series of switches and dials; the engine gave a sharp whine.

Erimem raised her eyebrows. ‘That does not sound healthy.’

‘If I’m right,’ said Belmont, as he continued to reprogramme the reactor core, ‘SySTEM has set us on a course for Earth, and we’ll cross the hyper-real space threshold inside the atmosphere. The stress will cause *Anopheles* to disintegrate...’

‘... spreading the virus through the planet’s environment,’ finished Erimem. ‘The whole planet will become infected. Billions might die.’

‘Hundreds of billions, if the disease spreads to the Frontier.’

‘Then we must stop it,’ said Erimem, gazing over at Belmont. He’d moved over to another station which, after a few seconds of manipulation, triggered an even harsher whine to emanate from the hyperdrive.

‘Not long now,’ he murmured. ‘It’s a two person job, overloading the reactor core. It has to be, as a safety precaution.’ He paused, hesitated. ‘But it’s the only choice, isn’t it? The infection can’t reach Earth. If we detonate here, in the Deep Void, the pathogen should dissipate harmlessly.’

'I've seen you looking down at your ring, Erimem. I know that you can use it to get out of here in one piece. So go ahead. Use it. Save yourself. Don't worry about me, I'm sure it'll all turn out alright in the end.' He forced a smile. 'I hope so, anyway.'

'There are no escape pods?' asked Erimem. She followed Belmont's gesturing and arrived beside a control panel dominated by a large red lever. That was it, clearly: one half of the fail-safe system that would blow *Anopheles*, her remaining crewmember, and the alien pathogen into the depths of space.

'There's no point in having any,' Belmont told her, now standing beside his own lever. His hand hovered over it, savouring his last few minutes of life. 'Out this far in the Deep Void, the chance of being picked up by another ship before your life support fails is too low to bother. That's assuming SySTEM hasn't locked us out of those too.'

His forced smile cracked. 'I don't want to die,' he said sadly. 'I don't want to die, but I have to. I have to do something to protect the people I care about... I have a wife, you know, back in Federation Space. Before all this happened, I was trying to write to her. Just an update. Well, you go to her. You've got magical time travel technology. Tell her what happened here today, what I did for her sake, and for the sake of everyone else. Make sure she remembers me,' he added, before yanking the lever down. Erimem did the same.

The engine began to gurgle like an empty stomach as the complex chemical and particle reactions which carried the ship through hyperspace began to break down and implode.

'I will tell her,' said Erimem, fumbling awkwardly with her ring. Belmont watched as she faded into the aether with a nod.

He slumped to the floor, alarms blaring all around. Not long now. Not long now. He thought back to meeting his wife, to meeting Maria, beneath the spreading boughs of an old synthetic oak tree. It was enough, at the end, to think of her. Almost. It was...

SySTEM screamed in frustration.

Belmont held his breath and smiled.

Anopheles exploded into nothingness.

Maria Belmont had always hated funerals. She'd hated the clothes, so drab and austere and dreary. She hated the bad food and the compassionate stares. And she hated losing people, and not knowing why, or how, or even where.

An accident in Deep Void. That was what the message had said, from the Space Service, when the investigation into her husband's disappearance had concluded. They didn't have any answers. They didn't even have his body.

Maria hated it all. How many people had walked past her today on the way to the holo-chapel, wishing her condolences. She hated them, with their living lovers and husbands and wives. It wasn't fair.

This last mourner was different, though. Maria didn't recognise her; could she be someone from Sam's work? He'd never mentioned anyone like her. For half a moment Maria wondered if this woman was the remains of some extra-marital fling that he'd never bothered to tell her about. She looked like his type.

'My name is Erimem,' said the woman, when she arrived beside Maria. 'Your husband sent me. He has a message for you.'

Maria's ears pricked up. 'A... message?' she sniffed. 'What was it?'

The woman called Erimem cleared her throat. '*Anopheles* slipped out of hyperdrive like an armoured lobster. Two pincer-like arms extended outwards from the front of the scow, reaching out into the deep, dark void...'

The Last Anti-Possibility Engine

by Gallifrey Immigrant

What if the Barbara Benedetti Doctor, the blonde alternate Seventh Doctor from a 1980s fanseries, returned in prose form?

Carl watched the smoke rising from the holes in the ground. It gave him the willies, quite frankly. Something was broiling inside those holes, and it smelled rancid. The Doctor didn't seem to notice the smell, but then again, she rarely did notice the simple things.

She was standing on top of a huge creature. The creature had huge tusks, and reminded Carl of some pictures of an elephant the Doctor had showed him before. But this creature was larger, with rainbow fur ("you see, meant to attract mates, Carl") and bright blue eyes. Those eyes were blank now—this one was dead. Carl wondered what could fell such a majestic creature.

The Doctor finally hopped off her perch. Carl held his arms out to catch her, but she ignored it. Brushing dust off her white military-style jacket, Carl caught an angry glint in her eye, and could barely get a word out as she rushed in the direction of the camp not far ahead. He rolled his eyes, and prepared to follow her.

Then she suddenly swerved around, and stared at the huge creature. Then she looked straight into Carl's eyes, and said "That creature isn't supposed to die until old age, in hundreds of years."

"Looks rather grown-up to me," said Carl. The Doctor's glance let him know that was the wrong response.

"Sometimes, Carl, you are a complete idiot. That's a baby. A completely innocent, newly-grown life form, and it was cut down in her prime."

Carl took another look at the giant creature, into its bright blue eyes, and felt a pang of sadness. "That's rather sad. Was it like, a predator who killed it?"

The Doctor knelt till she was at the creature's eye-level. "The Mulloth have no natural predators. They breed very slowly, and die very rarely. They only die when the life-force of the planet has been disturbed."

"Planets have life-forces?" asked Carl.

The Doctor glared at him. "Why wouldn't they?"

Carl shrugged. Why wouldn't they, indeed!

Carl noticed, in the distance, a group of warriors on horses. They reminded Carl of those pictures of "savages" in those lurid books he used to read. Their eyes looked angry, and black straps were attached to their chest, knife handles sticking out. As they got closer, Carl prepared to make a quick retreat. However, the Doctor stood fast. As these armed soldiers dismounted, the Doctor crossed her arms.

"Did you kill that beast?" asked the Doctor.

The soldier in front blinked confusingly at the Doctor. His skin was chalk-white, and his eyes were pure blue. He said "No. A creature did."

"And where is this creature? I'd like to have some strong words with him," said the Doctor.

A woman soldier replied "So would we. But she disappeared. She fell into the dark spaces."

"Dark spaces?" asked Carl.

"Speak sense!" said the Doctor.

"We cannot," said the man.

"Why not?"

"Because you just told us not to. You told us, if we saw you again, to explain nothing."

"But that makes no bloomin' sense. We just got here!" said Carl, waving his hands in the air.

The Doctor sighed loudly. "No, it makes perfect sense. It's a time loop."

"Time loop?" asked Carl. The Doctor always had such weird terms.

"It's when an event has already happened, but not for us yet. It'll be easier to just show you. Come on, Carl. Let's return to the TARDIS."

The Doctor and Carl were soon far away. The horse riders watched them leave.

A few days ago, the TARDIS appeared in the same space. Carl and the Doctor strolled out onto the plain. The weather felt colder now, to Carl. It clung to his body, getting past his gentleman's coat. The sky was overcast now, the clouds obscuring the red light flowing.

"That's the color of the sky in the night time. The inhabitants of the village we're about to visit say that there is a giant computer in the sky, watching their every move, and the heat from the computer creates the red haze," said the Doctor.

Carl looked up, trying to imagine a giant robot in the sky. "Wouldn't that be a bit weird, having a robot watch your every move?"

"Not to them. They consider it more of a loving parent, watching their children," said the Doctor. Her face turned back to look at Carl, winking at him. "Must learn to think beyond your culture's preconceptions, Carl."

"My culture doesn't even have robots," objected Carl. He had been raised in the times of chimney sweepers, where people still rode horse and buggy. The "cars" and "computers" the Doctor had shown him both astounded and frightened him.

The Doctor didn't respond to that, as she was too busy watching a crowd of people up ahead. They appeared to be arguing amongst themselves. Carl recognized them a few of them as the horseback riders they had met a few minutes ago. Or a few days into the future.

"We cannot go into the dark place," said a man. He wore a metallic skin over his body, with an armor overlacing his head. It had electricity arcing over it, and gave him a

fearsome presence, which contrasted with his young voice. Carl guessed he was only a few years beyond a child's age.

"You saw it! The hole grabbed him, and drove him under! We must rescue him," said a woman. Carl recognized her from before. She wore a linen shirt, with purplish plates studding the surface. Her eyes were wide, as she looked around. She looked to be around 30ish or so, and held herself with a confident air.

"You would doom us all! We all felt it—that horrific burning intelligence within that cave. It spoke to our minds. Just because your brother was too weak to resist does not mean we should follow him? Must we risk our skins for you, Alma" said an older woman on the sidelines.

"Of course you would say that, Rushin. You've never risked a day in your life!" snarled Alma.

Carl looked at the Doctor, who was patiently watching the argument while eating a jelly baby. "Um, should we leave them to it?"

The villagers stopped arguing and turned to see Carl and the Doctor.

"I didn't mean to interrupt. Carry on," said the Doctor.

"You!" said Alma, pointing at Carl. "Why are you here?"

"Really?" said Carl.

"Yes. You told me that my brother would be safe. You lied!" Alma said.

"Oh. Sorry, miss," said Carl. It sounded lame to Carl's ears.

"Sorry? That's all? My brother is in the Underworld!" said Alma.

"What's the Underworld?" asked the Doctor.

"It is a portal to a singularity. It's called the Null Point—the place where the nemesis of the All-Mother," said Rushin, pointing upwards at the sky, "resides. It is a dark creature, who was always rumoured to exist down there. But then...it started speaking."

“Ah. Never a good sign, when your fabled nemesis of your sun starts speaking back to you. I take it the Null Point wasn’t very nice?”

“It drove us mad. Children began forgetting their names, our elder ran into the forest and never returned. Even the weather has started to shift—our crops have gotten no water in days. A curse has swept over the land,” said Rushin.

“Wait. Why are we telling you anything? Who are you?” asked another man.

“Ah, I’m the Doctor. You could say I specialize in fixing these sort of troubles. Carl here is my assistant,” said the Doctor, waving a hand towards Carl, who nodded and tried to look “heroic”, and nearly tripped. The Doctor ignored his pratfall, and continued “Let me see this Null Point. I’m sure it’s much less mysterious than it seems.”

Alma suddenly interjected “I’ll take them there. You need a guide. It is too dangerous otherwise.”

“Very well,” said the Doctor. “Lead the way!”

Going to the cave was a very weird experience. One half of the trail was filled with beautiful flowers, and large leaves that spread across the floor. But, as they drew closer to the cave, the ground began to redden, and the leaves started to curdle. The smell of ammonia began to fill the air.

“Doctor, what does this null point have to do with the dead elephant thingie?” asked Carl.

“Everything, Carl. Something on this planet is out of balance. The dead “elephant thingie” is just a side effect. The very life force of the planet has been invaded. And that creature in the cave has something to do with it,” said the Doctor.

“You mean that nemesis god is real?”

“Well, I wouldn’t say that. But that doesn’t mean we aren’t dealing with something very dangerous. Can’t you sense it?” asked the Doctor.

“Well, this place is a bit spooky.”

She nodded, her eyes tightening. “It’s more than spooky.”

Up ahead, the mouth of the cave seemed to swallow them up as they walked forward. The darkness seemed to press down on Carl, nearly choking him. It wasn't just that this was a gloomy place, but there was a sense that the group were fighting against an opposing force. Like 2 magnets' north poles drawn closer—something was pushing them away.

"Where did you come from?" asked Alma. She didn't look back as she talked, being careful to avoid the granite knives sticking from the ground.

"Oh, from around," said the Doctor. Her skin was looking pale. Carl guessed that she too could feel the odd sense of being pushed away.

"You are from the sky?" asked Alma.

The Doctor and Carl stopped at that. Alma turned back, the light from the torch showing the contours of her face. It looked angular, with blue face-paint that seemed to glow in the dark. Her eyes seemed incisive, cutting into Carl's mind.

"Yes, you could say that," said the Doctor cautiously. "How did you know?"

Alma smiled, without responding. She led them further and further into the darkness, until they were in a large room, with a glowing blue light in the center. She walked to the light, staring straight at it without blinking.

"This is the place, This is where my brother went to," said the woman.

"Looks like a giant light," said Carl, who turned to the Doctor. Her face was staring straight ahead, her mouth muttering something unintelligible. Her face was in horror at what she was seeing.

"What's wrong, Doctor?" asked Carl.

The Doctor closed her eyes, and for a moment, the lines of her face began to extend, like someone was stretching her face. And then she opened her eyes, and her face transformed back into its normal form. Carl was really hoping that was a trick of the light. She extended an arm out, drawing Carl closer.

“Everything here is wrong. Fractals are falling out of place, the angles here aren’t adding up. Something has corrupted this space,” said the Doctor. She focused her eyes on Alma, who was standing in the blue light now.

“Your brother, what exactly happened to him?”

“He came here, searching for enlightenment. They say, in the old days, there was gods that gave us information. Creatures made of metal, that taught us great knowledge. These creatures came from the void, and from their mouths spewed wonderful knowledge. My brother wished to seek that knowledge for himself,” said Alma.

“And did he find that, uh, knowledge?” asked Carl.

Alma stared down at the light. “I’m not sure.”

The Doctor said “Oh, I think you do know.”

There was an anger in her tone. Carl could tell that he had missed something important, but he could not tell exactly what. The Doctor suddenly handed him the TARDIS key quietly, without bringing attention to the action. She didn’t want Alma to know.

“And why would I know?”

“For one, I don’t think you’re native to this region. You’ve got a good act, but your accent could use some work,” said the Doctor.

Alma turned her head to the side, as if getting a closer look at the Doctor. “Very well. Maybe I’m not from here. Where am I from, then?”

“Not sure. To be honest, that’s much less interesting to me, than the answer to why there’s a antipossibility engine in the middle of a pre-industrialized colony world.”

“Anti-what?” said Carl.

“I’ll explain later,” said the Doctor off-handedly.

“This engine is broken, Doctor. It’s destroying the very vitality of this planet. Having you to check up on it would help these people, and myself, of course.”

“How fortunate that I’m here to be of service. Almost too coincidental, wouldn’t you say.”

“Will you help me, or not?”

The Doctor frowned. She turned to look at Carl, and leaned over, whispering something into his ear. He couldn’t understand it, and he was about to ask her to repeat it, when she immediately said “I’ll help, Alma. What do I have to do?”

“Simply jump into the light. The engine will swallow you up into its calculations, and you’ll be able to do your work from there,” said Alma.

“Hold on. How do we know this is gonna be safe? Is this what you told your brother to do? Is he even your brother?” asked Carl.

Alma glared at him, like he was an uninteresting dog yapping at her heel. Carl gave her a glare back. He wasn’t gonna be cowed by some random weird woman saying enigmatic phrases.

“Oh, I’m sure it’s perfectly legal. If it isn’t, I’ll throw in a complaint with the nearest review board. Stay here, Carl,” said the Doctor sharply. A small smile flitted onto her face, and then it returned to a serious expression, as she walked to the edge of the blue light.

“Be careful, Doctor”, called out Carl.

“Of course, Carl,” the Doctor said. And then she jumped inside.

The light shone brighter immediately. So bright that Carl had to close his eyes, and then the light still got past his eyelids, and then into his mind, and then into his consciousness, and then--

It was over. He opened his eyes, and saw nothing but the darkness of the cave. Alma was by his side, peering strangely at him.

“Where did the Doctor go?” asked Carl.

“Into the biodata of the planet,” said Alma.

“When is she getting out?”

“What makes you think she is?” said Alma. Upon seeing Carl’s shock, she grinned. “She might get out. That renegade’s got an odd sense of luck about her.”

“Renegade? From what?” asked Carl.

Alma relit the torch, bringing light to the area. “From her Homeworld. She didn’t tell you about this?”

“She probably mentioned it,” said Carl.

Alma shrugged. She motioned for Carl to follow her, as they left the cave.

“You and your brother aren’t from here, right? Then where are you from?”

Ignoring the question, Alma said “Do you know where your timeship is?”

Carl guessed she meant TARDIS, but decided to play dumb. “Time-ship? Don’t know what that is.”

Alma turned around, and glared at him again. “You’re not a very smart primate, are you?”

“I’m a VERY smart primate, thank you very much! Now, you’re gonna tell me exactly what the Doctor is doing right now, and what an “entiposibilty engine” is!” demanded Carl. “And who you are!”

Alma smiled, and said nothing. She pointed her hand toward empty space, and snapped her fingers. Her shadow began to extend, until it formed a black mass pooling in front of her, and three bodies began to climb out of the mass. They each wore bone masks, and black armor. One was a darker-skinned man, one was a blue skinned woman, and one was a pale-skinned redhead.

“Have you sent the Renegade into the Engine?” asked the dark-skinned man. “It would reflect poorly on you if you brought us here without doing the task that was assigned to you.”

“I did,” said Alma testily.

“Have you found the time-ship?” asked the blue woman.

“No, the human might know.”

All eyes went to Carl.

“Hello. I’m Carl, and rather confused,” he said.

“You must be the Doctor’s companion. My name is Cousin Miria. The man here is Cousin Ferrox, and the other woman here is Cousin Hyacinth. We mean you no harm,” said the redhead. She had an Irish lilt to her voice, and held out her hand to shake. Carl shook her hand, finding the grip rather firm.

“You’re Cousins?” asked Carl.

“Of a sort. We are part of Faction Paradox. Has the Renegade mentioned us?” asked Ferrox.

“No,” said Carl. “So, what exactly is the engine that the Doctor jumped into?”

Cousin Miria clasped her hands together. “Oh, Alma! You haven’t even educated our guest!”

“I didn’t have time,” said Alma.

Hyacinth suddenly cut in “We still don’t have time. We’ve held up our part of the bargain—now we need our Benefactor to hold up his part.”

“When will he be here?” asked Ferrox.

“Who’s the Benefactor?” asked Carl.

“We’ve never met him, actually,” said Ferrox.

“Oh, there’s no need to bore him with details,” said Miria suddenly, grabbing Carl, and grinning widely. Something about her cheer felt off to Carl. There was something behind her gaze...

“Don’t take any from him,” warned Hyacinth. “If the Renegade comes back, she won’t appreciate us hurting him.”

“Take what?” asked Carl. Then, “Wait, *if* she comes back--”

Cousin Miria suddenly slammed him into the ground. Her eyes began to redden, and fangs jutted from her mouth. In the same cheerful tone, she said “Listen, human. You will not complain. You will help us find the time-ship, and then you’ll sit back as we take it someplace nice and safe. Okay? I’d hate to have to kill a nice man like you.”

“Uh...fine,” said Carl. He had no intention of giving them the TARDIS, but he wasn’t quite sure what to do to stall them. He would figure something out, though.

The Anti-possibility Engine is a device made in the Time forges of Senthia’s First Battalion. It was a simple idea—simply strip the number of ways an event could happen. Take away single properties of space-time, one at a time, until the event became less likely. Usually, it was done with the equivalent of a simulation machine, allowing a post-human to perceive alternate curses of action without actually suffering the consequences.

Time Lords were not the ones who made this device, nor were they the ones who used it primarily. They had no need to. One could argue that Time Lords were walking possibility engines, constantly aware that time can shift (One can argue that most of pre-War Homeworld was about the Time Lords trying desperately to deny that they knew time could shift). But, to be honest, a device that only stripped away one detail of history at a time was essentially so weak to be useless in the War.

That is, until someone decided to try and focus an anti-possibility engine on itself. What if you stripped away the parts of history that made the engine exist? Logically, the engine would just cease to exist in space-time.

That is what was expected. What actually happened, however, caused the Time Lords to rip into the post-humans’ timeline and desperately attempt to drive the anti-possibility engine from existence. That only made things worse.

The Doctor existed.

And with a thought, she created a physical form within the subspace of the anti-possibility engine, and tailored it to her physical form in real space. She opened her eyes, and saw a vast grey world outside. A blueish glow suffused the landscape, covering the buildings around the area. Large cathedrals jutted from the ground, with odd drawings of unknown creatures etched into the surface. The Doctor found the drawings, which included gnome men being erased by giant mechanical creatures, and giant men riding giant flying lizards, a bit overdone.

She walked for what seemed like ages. No one else but her was around, as she walked over ruins. Roman architecture, mixed with German tanks, mixed with aqueous creatures that flowed across the stone, leaving a wetness like a snail. The Doctor observed them all, but said nothing.

And then, she saw someone walking toward her. He wore a grey suit, and equally grey pants. His eyes glowed with white, and as she sat on the edge of a stairway that seemed to go up infinitely, he nodded at her. When he arrived at her location, she could see his face. It looked a lot like Alma's face.

"Homeworlder. I am the Grey One. At least, I think that is my name," said the man. At least, she assumed he was a man. The Doctor extended her hand, and the grey person shook it happily.

"I haven't been called Homeworlder for a long time. I'm the Doctor. I think I've met your sister?"

"Alma? Ah, yes. How is she?"

"Quite well, I think. Do you know where we are?" asked the Doctor.

"We are in a vector space within the anti-possibility machine. It's made of bits and bobs of life that was brought out of real existence. Rather amazing, what's been lost too time. There's this wonderful book, called Wallowing in...ah, but you wouldn't want to talk about that. Why are you here, Doctor?"

"Your sister sent me here. She told me this was the place to figure out what was wrong with the planet," said the Doctor. The grey one opened his mouth to speak, but the Doctor shook her head.

"How interesting. Except it was a trap."

“Well, of course it was a trap,” said the Doctor irritably. She stood up suddenly, and stared straight into the man’s eyes. “I am not an idiot. I came here to find out what was wrong with this engine. As in, why it even exists. I thought they had all been deleted from the timeline by my kind.”

“You Homeworlders would assume that, right? That once Pandora’s Box was opened, you could just slap it back closed, and everything would be over. Except it wasn’t that easy. Because the anti-possibility engines fought back. Turns out when you try to make an engine cancel itself, it gets angry. And when you piss off something that can mess with your own history, things go poorly for you.”

“Hold on. Why are you even in here? You’re not from this planet?”

“I used to work on engines like these. Before your kind dropped in and mucked it up. I holed away, on this particular planet, hiding away from your influence. My sister and I blended with the natives, keeping to ourselves. It was a nice existence...until something went wrong.”

“Something always goes wrong,” said the Doctor knowingly.

Suddenly, the staircase disappeared. The Doctor fell down, hitting her forehead. The Grey One helped her up, as the sky took on a greenish color.

“That hurt!” said the Doctor. “Why would a staircase just disappear like that?”

“You need to go,” said the Grey One. “It’s found us.”

“Who found us?” said the Doctor.

A shadow flickered in the distance. It looked long and gangly, and reminded the Doctor of something she had learned when young, but she couldn’t quite place it. Just a feeling of dread.

“Not a ‘who.’ You see, I went into this engine’s internals to find out what was affecting the village. There was some distortion in the engine’s insides...it was turning on, disrupting reality, without me asking it too. Worse, it was creating a Null Point within itself, waking itself up out of self-inflicted pain. And I could not figure out why.”

The shadow flickered to existence, and stayed there. It grew to twice her height, and continued to grow, and started to step. Hooves began to form on its feet, and its head became a triangle with more than three sides. The Doctor could perceive its geometry with little trouble, but Carl would have gone mad if he had tried to perceive it.

Carl. She had to find her way back to him. “How do I escape this place?”

“I don’t know. We have bigger things to worry about,” said the Grey One. He grabbed her arm. “You see, this was a trap meant for you. Something in particular wants you in here. However, I don’t.”

“How nice of you. Now, let’s get going,” said the Doctor, who tried to hurry on. The Grey One stopped her from moving.

“Unfortunately, the anti-possibility engine doesn’t just delete pieces of time and space. It replaces what was deleted with pieces of itself. Pieces of history that possess its consciousness. And I have been here so long, having pieces of myself eaten and replaced, that I am more it than me now,” said the Grey One. “It needs you, Doctor. It needs your essence. Free yourself from my grasp, or I will give you to it. I cannot stop myself. I cannot stop it,”

The Doctor looked into the man’s sad pleading eyes, and nodded. Then she punched him hard, and he fell down. She looked at the shadow and saw *the beauty of corruption and nonexistence and please why don’t you come join us Doctor*

“Oh, I don’t think so!” said the Doctor, while running from the storm of non-Euclidean shadows following her.

“Run, Doctor! Run from its song!” cried the Grey One behind her. “Can’t you hear its song? Can’t you hear its beautiful singing?”

Indeed, she could. She could hear the song throughout the whole plane, as it turned its attention toward her, and prepared to devour her.

“Not if I can help it” snarled the Doctor to the air. As she ran, she hoped Carl was having a better experience on the outside.

"Come on, boy! You've to put work into it if you want to get paid at all in the business" called out his master. The man's name was actually Nate, but Carl would only think of him, till the day the man died, as "master." This man had been a chimney sweep when he was young, but was now too old to fit in the chimney. Thus, he had taken on apprentices. Carl was his sixth, out of three currently alive. The other three had died young. This unlucky streak of early death for his apprentices had made his master even harsher on his remaining apprentices. This seemed counterproductive to Carl even back then, but at that age, he was in no shape to argue.

The soot nearly made Carl choke, as he brushed away the dirt. The blackness covered his face, even through the cap. He forced himself to keep brushing. His muscles were cramped in this chimney, his legs with barely any moving space. His arms were tired, and he couldn't help but take a time to stop.

"Faster, boy, faster!"

He ignored the command. His arms were about to fall off.

"Don't make me send one of the others to prick you with needles to get you working faster? Or, maybe sell you back to the streets, heh? I paid your parents good shillings for you! Maybe I should get back my investment."

Carl felt his heart turn at that. No matter how bad sweeping was, the streets were even worse. He began to sweep again. He looked down, and saw his master staring at him.

And then his master's shadow moved, and began to cover his face, and transformed into a triangle with more than three sides, and he began to scream (or was that Carl), and the shadow began to cover Carl, like an everlasting flood of soot invading his mouth, choking him in a chimney forever.

Carl woke up in the backseat of a moving vehicle. An extremely fast moving vehicle. It took a few moments of fright for him to realize it was just one of those motor vehicles the Doctor had told him about. He sat up, looking around the car. The first thing he noticed was that the driver wasn't actually holding the steering wheel.

"Self-driving car," said Cousin Miria, making him jump. She was in the seat behind him, smiling her same shark grin. She wasn't wearing the skull mask now, and Carl could see her rather nice-looking green eyes.

"Last thing I remember, you threatened to kill me," said Carl.

"I threatened to kill you if you didn't comply. Just comply, and you won't be harmed," said Miria.

"Probably," said the driver. It was...Ferrox, Carl remembered now. His eyes were focused on a screen with an arrow moving across a line. Carl guessed it was a guide controlling the car. To a destination, perhaps?

"I'm telling ya, the Doctor wouldn't tell me where her time-ship is. By the way, where are we going?" asked Carl.

"To a meeting place. We have a deal we need to make," said Hyacinth. She was sitting in the seat next to Ferrox. Carl noticed she was still wearing that weird bone mask. "We can't spend the time to walk around while you waste our time, telling us you don't know where the TARDIS is."

"Who even are you people? Why are you messing with us?"

"We're Faction Paradox. We're a group who spurns the Time Lords, and who spend our time working with and against agents of the War in Heaven."

Carl frowned. "You're angels?"

"More like people willing to trade with devils or angels to suit our needs," said Miria.

Carl thought that sounded ridiculous, but said "Fine. Why did you need to throw the Doctor in the anti-engine thing?"

The car stopped.

"Time to go," said Miria. She dragged Carl out the car roughly, and the group walked into a grassy field. For a moment, the reality began to shimmer, and a 3456==7555*&&&& something stepped out.

It stared at Carl with a confused expression. Then, his eyes refocused, and he saw it was a human woman, wearing glasses. Except she was not human, and yet not not human-looking. It reminded him of the sense of weirdness he got upon looking at the Doctor, except worse.

"Why is a primate here?" asked the woman.

"The Doctor's human tag-along. We thought to dispose of him, but he may know the location of the time-ship, and his biodata may be of use," said Hyacinth.

"Very well. I am Regtha, of House Arpexia of the Greater Homeworld," said Regtha, bowing slightly. Black hair fell open her shoulders, and a dress suit made of silver covered her body. Carl got the sense that she was of a higher-class, both from her bearing and her posh accent.

"You are the Benefactor?" asked Ferrox sharply.

"No. I represent the Benefactor, which is all you need to know," said Regtha.

"All we need to know? We're about to give away the biggest piece of War weaponry away, and you expect us to work with you on faith?" said Miria.

Upon looking at Miria, a quick, but undeniable, expression of disgust filled Regtha's face. She hid it almost immediately, and said "The Benefactor said you would encounter the chance to trap the Renegade of Healing, did she not? And did she not keep her word?"

"That could have been coincidence. Or just looking into the future," said Hyacinth.

"One does not capture the Doctor by 'coincidence'," said Regtha. "She is a rather slippery fellow."

"Hey!" interrupted Carl. Regtha's eyes focused on Carl, and he got that "staring into my soul" feeling he sometimes got from the Doctor. Were they related, somehow? "I'm the Doctor's friend. If you're gonna hurt her, you'll have to get through me."

There was a short pause. Carl started to feel rather embarrassed. Then Regtha replied "Hmm. You honestly care for the Doctor. How interesting. Is it because she looks human, like you?"

"Um...maybe? I mean, not just because of that!"

"Would you care about a dog the same way? A mouse? What about a bacterium?"

“What’s a bacterium?”

“Never mind. In any case, we do not intend to harm her. Simply use her future selves to help us win the War. We’ve been trying to contact her, but she’s been taking too much *time* to reply,” said Regtha, grinning at some sort of joke. “No harm will be done to her.”

“Of course not,” said Ferrox. Then he pulled out a rifle, and fired two shots at her hearts.

The Doctor sat on a wooden chair that was resting on the wall a dilapidated castle, drinking from a cup that began to slowly chip away, even as she put it down. Across from her, on another chair, was Carl. Well, some creature in the form of Carl.

“You know, you can only keep resisting for so long,” said the Carl clone.

“I resent you taking that form. Carl is a dear friend to me, and I don’t like you mimicking him that way,” said the Doctor.

“I’m attempting to make you more comfortable,” said the Carl clone.

“Well, it isn’t working,” said the Doctor. She leaned over, and said “Tell me, who are you?”

“I don’t have a name. Call me the Engine, for simplicity. I was forged to affect reality, to help the post-human races in their lust to control reality. They were fools, the whole lot of them,” grumbled the Engine. “But they were useful fools. They played their part well, manipulating my controls, deleting strips of history bare. Sooner or later, they were going to reverse my nature upon myself, unleashing the intelligence within.”

“You planned this?”

“Did I? I cannot remember if I planned it. I cannot know whether all of my brethren, across all of reality, my fellow Engines, whether we all planned this. Whether we all planned to be struck down, until only I was left, sleeping in this planet, feeding on its life-force. Polluting the planet from inside its core. I cannot know. But I do know, that shortly, I will be awakened.”

“How do you know that?”

“Because, I have stripped the possibilities of history, till only that possibility is left,” said the Engine. It smiled with Carl’s mouth, into a jagged-tooth grin.

“Bit unfair, stacking the deck in your favor,” said the Doctor. She swallowed, and felt a sharp pain in her stomach. The pain stayed, like a low throbbing ache. “Um, Mr. Engine, I hate to be presumptuous, but are you attempting to invade my mind?”

The Engine made an apologetic sound. “I’m sorry, I forgot to mention. That drink you’re taking is a part of this realm, so now the infection is digesting you faster.”

“Oh! That’s no problem. What a small thing to forget!” said the Doctor, waving it away. She stood up from the chair, and brushed herself off.

“I’m happy you’re not insulted,” said the Engine cheerfully. “By the way, I prefer to be referred to as “she”. I hope that’s not too much trouble?”

“Not at all. Us girls have to stick up for each other, you know? By the way, what do you plan to do once you’re unleashed? If it’s anything bad, I’ll have to stop you, of course. I suspect you already knew that, though.”

“Of course. It was your very reputation as a troublemaker that I was counting on to bring you here. All I had to do was get someone to tell you that you’d been here now, and you would come to this point in time to avoid a paradox. And, the rest of the pieces fell into place.”

A slice of pain shot through the Doctor’s gut, invading her biodata, and leaving a permanent mark. She involuntarily winced, clenching her teeth. She focused her mind, tried to think beyond the pain. Losing her concentration in this place could be fatal. Forcing herself to stare at her opponent, she snarled “Well played. But, what exactly are you trying to achieve with this?”

The Engine chuckled. “You’ll see.”

Carl ran to Regtha, who was breathing shakily on the floor. “You’ve killed her!”

“So? She was a filthy Homeworlder. Would have betrayed us anyway,” said Ferrox. He pushed Carl away, and rifled through Regtha’s clothes, until he found a long pyramidal object on a strong. For some reason, it hurt Carl’s eyes to look at. Ferrox took out what looked like a tuning fork from his pocket, and struck the object three times, causing a loud sound to emit. Each time, the pitch grew higher and higher. On the final strike, the clouds began to darken.

“What have you done?” asked Carl.

“We’ve just completed our goal. We’ve gotten the actual controls for the last Anti-possibility Engine in existence. That’s priceless!” said Hyacinth.

“You manipulated the Doctor and me just to get a stupid engine?” screamed Carl. He had to scream, because the winds were picking up. In a flash, the weather had suddenly become stormy.

“Not just any engine!” screamed Miria. “An engine that scared even the Homeworlders!”

Miria’s eyes went red, as she focused on the dying Regtha. “All this effort is making me bloody thirsty. No one here minds if I feed, right?”

The other Faction members shrugged. Smiling gratefully, she moved to Regtha’s body, sharp fangs jutting from her mouth. Her stance became predatory, as she slowly slinked toward the woman. A horrible realization entered Carl’s mind, as he realized just exactly Miriam was.

“No!” he said, shielding Regtha’s body. “You can’t have her!”

The look Miria gave him nearly made him run away, back to the TARDIS. A blue hand pulled away, as Miria crouched over the body of the Homeworlder.

“If you get in her way, she’ll drink you too,” said Hyacinth in her ear. “I do not wish you to be harmed unnecessarily.”

Carl could only watch as Miria began to giggle a girlish laugh. With a sharp nail, she cut Regtha’s wrist, drawing blood. Specks of red were slowly drawn to her mouth, and she made a sound of utter joy.

“Oh, Homeworlder. I’m going to play with you. And then, when you’re done screaming, and I’m quenched, I’m gonna turn you. So, when you see yourself in the mirror, you’ll always hate yourself. Knowing you’ve been turned into the enemies of your own kind,” said Miria. Then she put on a mock-quizzical expression, and then said “Or maybe I’ll just kill you.”

Regtha grinned, and said “Come and try.”

Miria roared at that, and said “In the name of the Faction--”

She didn’t get to finish, as Miria was cut off by a silver dagger thrown into her abdomen, that had been hidden under Regtha’s shirt. A yellow light passed from her abdomen, through the knife, and into Regtha’s body. Miria’s face showed surprise and anger, as her face began to age in the span of a few seconds.

By the time Carl had registered what had happened, Miriam was a pile of dust on the floor. Regtha stood above her, smiling.

“How dare--” started Ferrox.

“You Faction people never think big enough,” cut in Regtha. Then she looked at Carl, winked, and bright purple light pulsed from her body. It wrapped around her in a spiral, engulfing her body like a python engulfs its prey. Then it finished, and left in its wake a redheaded young girl, with long reddish hair, and bright green eyes.

Carl closed his eyes for a second. This day had just gotten too weird.

Ferrox pointed his gun at the redheaded girl, but she rolled her eyes. Reaching into her pocket, she injected herself with a liquid. Then she said “You’re wasting your gun shots. You should save them for what’s coming.”

“Which is?” said Hyacinth.

“The Benefactor,” said Regtha.

The Doctor’s skin felt ashen. Her insides felt coated with soot, like a clogged chimney. Her consciousness was locked in a fort, battling the infection from within. She knew she

could last another few years (had it been years?) in this place, but she wasn't sure if she would come back mentally intact.

She sat in the halls of a church. It appeared to be the church for a version of Christianity that had been ripped from the time-line. It seemed to focus on a female prophet of some sort. She wondered why that had been deleted from the timeline. How many lives had been created and wiped from existence, with that one alteration? And why hadn't the Time Lords noticed? Or did they notice, and just not care?

Back in her first incarnation, while he had worked in the halls of Gallifreyan government, had he noticed? Had he cared?

The Grey One walked into the Church. He walked to her, and sat down next to her.

She refused to look at him. She didn't want to see the infection crawling over her skin, reflected in his eyes.

"You've lasted longer than I expected," said the Grey One. She didn't respond, so he continued "You have to know this is useless struggle. I have all the time in the world."

"So do I," said the Doctor. It hurt her mouth to speak, as the fungal greyness within her impeded her attempt to move her mouth.

"Continue to lie to yourself, Doctor. It will only delay the inevitable. The Engine will continue her work on your system," said the Grey One. Then, he cleared his throat. "You know, I tire of being put in the role of the villain."

"Ah, you're clearly the one suffering here."

"Don't be clever, Doctor."

"You may as well ask me to not be myself. Well, you've been asking me to not be myself for years now, but you know what I mean."

"Doctor, when we brought the Engine here, we expected none of these problems. We wanted a simple life on that planet. Far away from the War between your planet and the Enemy."

"I've heard of that War. It sounds like 2 academics battling over temporal theory, except that this time, both the academics have guns."

The Grey One grimaced at that. "At least you can laugh about it. It wasn't so funny when we were in the thick of it."

"I'm sorry about that," replied the Doctor honestly.

"We simply wanted to use the device to bring fame and fortune to ourselves. Simply snip away the possibilities of us failing. We didn't know it would begin to pollute the life-force of the planet. We didn't know there was anything to pollute!"

"I don't blame you, if that's what you think."

"No, I mean...I don't want to bring horror to this world. I don't want to sacrifice myself to this thing. That's where you come in. You can meld with this Grey creature, and force your mind to control this Engine's will. You have the most indomitable will of any Time Lord. Let the creature consume you, and then win from the inside!"

The Doctor finally looked at the Grey One. She smiled at him. "That's very flattering that you think my will is so strong. But why didn't you ask me this before?"

"I had to wait and see how strong your mind really was. How well you could resist its force," he replied.

"I see," said the Doctor. She looked down at the ground. "Do you know what I have nightmares about?"

The Grey One blinked in surprise at the random question. "The Engine?"

"Oh please. The Engine's barely a scarecrow. There were scarier things in the bedtime stories I read to Susan. No, that's not what's in my nightmares," said the Doctor.

"Then what is?"

The Doctor looked back at the Grey One, and stared. And kept on staring, until the Grey One began to shiver. Until even the Engine nestling inside the consciousness of the Grey One started a twinge of a tremor. And allowing herself to smile, allowing a part of

herself she would never show around Carl to really, truly smile, until a horrific, unearthly glee stretched across her face.

“Let’s hope you’ll never find out,” said the Doctor.

A loud sound echoed within the realm. Once, twice, then thrice, each time with a louder pitch.

“Ah,” said the Grey One, showing a smile of his own. Or rather, the Engine’s smile “Showtime.”

Carl was nearly blown off his feet by the winds. His hat had flown far away, and he worried he might never get it back. There were other problems, though. The elephant-thingies that Carl and the Doctor had seen earlier were running amok, crushing the grass and the bushes beneath their feet, and screaming in what sounded like pain. And the sky was raining down so much water, like a pipe had burst inside the clouds, and wouldn’t stop leaking.

And Regtha looked calm throughout it all. Her skirt was whipping in the air, as she observed the ground began to shake. Ferrox and Hyacinth both looked about as worried as Carl felt.

And then the sky...Carl couldn’t quite explain it. The sky curved within itself, and from that created a hole that somehow both started and ended at the ground simultaneously. From that, someone began to walk out. Whoever it was, was covered in grey dust. When it spoke, Carl recognized the voice immediately.

“Doctor!” cried Carl with joy. He had never been happier to see her. “I knew you’d make it back!”

He ran to her, but she shook her head.

“STAY BACK, CARL!” she screamed at him. She had never ordered him with so much force. He stopped dead in his tracks. He noticed how tired she looked, and how dirty her entire body was. Even her jacket, normally unnaturally clean, looked dirty and torn. In fact, was her face...decaying? Carl realized that the grey dust wasn’t just on her skin—it was her skin.

“Oh, Doctor,” said Carl.

“Oh, be quiet. I’ll be fine, Carl. But don’t touch me. Your human body will be much less resistant than mine. I see you’ve made some new friends,” said the Doctor, nodding toward the Faction members, who were staring at her dumbly.

“My ‘new friends’ have threatened to murder me, and one was a vampire.”

“Sounds like the beginning of a wonderful friendship,” said the Doctor. She cracked a grin.

“This isn’t funny, Doctor. I think the world might be ending right now!” said Carl. Even as he spoke, the earth began to crack open, and the hole in the sky-ground became larger.

“Don’t be dramatic. The world probably is ending, but that’s no need to get excited,” said the Doctor. She calmly limped over to Carl, and being careful not to touch Carl, leaned over and said “You still have the TARDIS key?”

“Yes!”

“Good. If things get really bad, just use the TARDIS. There’ll be preset directions,” said the Doctor.

“This doesn’t count as really bad! What does bad look like--”

A shadow passed over the sky. A darker shadow than the storm clouds. In an instant, all the large beasts that had been roaming around dropped dead.

“Oh”, said Carl.

A giant form, made of blackness, walked through. Its’ eyes were circles with flat edges, and its feet were hooves made of triangles with more than three sides, bent upon each other. Carl could only look at it for a second, before the Doctor pulled his head away.

“Stare at it too long, and you’ll go insane,” said the Doctor.

Carl looked away, and instead saw Ferrox staring at the shadow, transfixed. Ferrox’s eyes began to water, and cry, as his face went slack with horror. Hyacinth noticed, and

pulled Ferrox's face away from the creature. The man crumpled to the ground, whispering who-knows-what.

The grass began to change. It began to morph into a snowy tundra, and then into a hot sand, and then into a blood-drenched beach, and back into grass.

"She's changing the timeline," said Regtha. "Can you fix this?"

"Sure, let me grab my tool kit," said the Doctor bitingly.

"What the BLOODY HELL is going on?" said Carl, exasperated.

"No need to swear, Carl. It's simple—the anti-possibility engine was activated by some idiot, and is now exercising its powers. Right now, it's just playing. In due time, it will stop playing, and start wreaking havoc."

"But why would an anti-possibility engine start attacking people?"

"Why wouldn't it? My kind eliminated them from existence. Unfortunately, it never occurred to my genius race that maybe, just maybe, the Engines had a will of its own. That every time it replaced a piece of history, it replaced it with a piece of space-time it can manipulate at will. A piece of space-time that they can use to spread to other places, like an infection. And where do you think it'll try to get to first?"

"Gallifrey," said Hyacinth.

"Yes," said the Doctor.

"So, it's definitely the end of the world?" asked Carl.

"Well, nothing's certain," said the Doctor.

Carl noticed someone walking across the field. He recognized her as Alma. "You! You're to blame for all this!"

The Doctor shushed him, and beckoned Alma over to her. "Glad to see you. Do you want to help me save the world?"

"I was promised my brother!" said Alma.

“And he’s here,” said a voice. It sounded like---

And then Carl was in a white room. Everything was immaculate, and clean. Carl noticed Alma, the Doctor and Hyacinth in the room. Even Ferrox was there, still rocking back and forth on the floor.

In the center of the room was a man. He wore grey pants, and a grey suit. He spoke, with a voice that sounded eerily like Carl’s master when Carl was an apprentice chimney sweeper.

“I am the Engine. I took the liberty of bringing you here, as the planet was a bit noisy,” he (*she*, a voice from within the crevices of the room corrected him in his mind) said. “I wish you to join my system, like your brother did.”

“I thought you said the Benefactor would free my brother! That’s why I helped you get on your planet!” said Alma to the Faction members.

“They were misinformed, or perhaps they lied. I am the Benefactor. I needed a way into the real world, and so I manipulated the time-line, and the individuals within it, to allow myself true activation. But you can still get your brother back.”

“She lies. Your brother is dead,” said the Doctor.

“Be quiet!” said Alma. To the Engine, she asked “How can I get my brother back?”

“Join my insides. Your brother is already part of me. I can sense him yearning for you to meet him again.”

“Alison, I saw what has happened to your brother in there. I met what’s left of his consciousness. He’s a dead deer that’s been mounted on a wall, and forced to speak. The Engine--”

“ENOUGH!” screeched the Engine, waving a hand. The Doctor’s features began to melt, revealing a carrot-topped blonde man with a colorful rainbow coat, and then again, into a blonde-haired man with a cream-colored coat, and then again....

“Stop. I want to hear what the Homeworlder has to say,” said Alma.

The Engine nodded, and waved again. The Doctor was back to normal.

“As I was saying before rudely interrupted, the Engine digests whatever it consumes. It corrupts whatever is left, until all that is left is the Engine. Whatever promises it’ll make, once you become part of it, you are no longer yourself. Your brother knew that. And that’s why your brother never would have asked you to join the Engine,” said the Doctor.

Alma’s face was uncertain.

The Engine shook her head. It closed its eyes, and transformed into a different form. Carl didn’t recognize it, but the face looked similar to Alma’s.”Sister.”

“Brother?” asked Alma. Her voice changed into a warmer tone. “Is that you?”

His brother nodded. “There’s whole worlds inside the Engine. Once she devour Gallifrey, she’ll be able to create a whole new reality inside herself. We can become the gods of that Earth. A utopia, where no one is ever hurt. Where the War can’t harm us.”

“No place can hide from the War forever,” said Hyacinth.

“Then we’ll put up a damn good fight,” said her brother.

Alma smiled. “That sounds just like you, brother.”

“Thank you, Alison,” he said.

Alma’s expression changed. Quickly, she asked “Do you remember when we were born? How our mother would tell us those fanciful stories about the older human eras?”

“Yes. They sure were weird,” said her brother.

Alma smiled sadly. “Except that we were raised by two men. My brother would never forget that.”

Her brother stared, shocked, and then smiled. “Well done. You’re right. I don’t remember what your brother remembered. I don’t even remember the name of your brother. Those memories were replaced. I am truly sorry about that, but I deemed them inessential. Only the barest bit of your brother’s mind remains.”

“You killed him?” asked Alma. “Because you deemed him inessential?”

“As the Engine will kill all of us, if it isn’t stopped,” whispered the Doctor.

“Your kind killed my kind. All of your kind did. You tried to cancel us from existence—wipe of from ever having lived. I did not want to join the War between Gallifrey and its Nemesis. But, if I must, I will,” the Engine grinned, “put up a damn good fight.”

“You could just not fight. You could leave us alone. Hide away somewhere,” said Carl.

“I appreciate the concern. But the War combatants wouldn’t let me rest, even if I wished to,” said the Engine.

The white room began to break into pieces.

“I tried to offer an easy way,” said the Engine.

“Screw your easy way,” said Alma. “If there’s anything of you in there, Rasion, my brother, fight against whatever this thing is.”

The Engine rolled her eyes. “Anyway, I tried the easy way, but you chose pain--”

She stopped speaking. As if something was holding her back.

“Everyone, very soon, I will say, look away. If you don’t, well, if you have bad nightmares, don’t blame me,” said the Doctor.

“Uh, what are you gonna do?” asked Carl.

“Fix the problem,” said the Doctor, with a look of utter anguish. Then she said “Look away!”

Carl looked down.

He heard the voice of the Engine say “It makes sense.”

Then a blood-curling scream.

Carl woke up to see the Doctor smiling down at him.

“Good morning, sleepyhead!” she said, tapping him lightly. “You slept the whole afternoon off. The villagers gave us ‘thank you for saving the world’ food, but I’ve eaten most of it.”

“What happened?” asked Carl.

“I saved the world,” said the Doctor, as if that explained everything. “Well, we saved the world. But I did the hard bit.”

“What did you do?” asked Carl.

“While the Engine was distracted by Alma’s brother battling within, I meshed my mind with the Engine’s and took over its will, shunting it into itself. Eternally. It’ll constantly be deleting itself, till infinity, or until entropy destroys it, whichever one comes first,” said the Doctor. She reached around, and offered Carl his hat.

“Thanks, Doctor. So we’re safe?”

“An asteroid could land on this planet at anytime and destroy the whole place. Safety is relative. Safety is never certain,” said the Doctor. “But are we safe from the Engine? Yes.”

“Good riddance!” said Carl.

“Have more sympathy. That was the last of its kind. I just committed genocide.”

Carl patted the Doctor’s shoulder. “It had to be done.”

“‘Had to be done.’ Wonderful use of passive voice to avoid responsibility. Orwell taught me to always think in active voice. Never forget who is doing the action, Carl. It may save your life one day, or your soul.”

The Doctor and Carl walked to the TARDIS. They found Regtha in front of the blue box.

“Well done, Doctor,” said Regtha. She was smiling at them, and Carl noted little fangs in her teeth. It made him shiver.

“You used us,” said the Doctor.

“What do you mean, Doc--”

“Don’t play games with me. How would the Engine be able to negotiate a deal between the Faction and two random post-humans? While still dormant?”

“I thought she manipulated the probabilities?” said Carl. Just when he thought he had the handle on the situation, there was yet another twist.

“Oh, never play poker Carl! Can’t you tell when someone’s bluffing you? She had power, but not that much power. Clearly, someone must have given her the information. Led her in the right directions, given her the clues. And then led me here. Why would Gallifrey do that? Why would they sanction that?”

“Who says I wasn’t acting alone? The War Effort’s best work is often done without their knowledge. Intentionally so,” said Regtha. Smirking, she continued “This Engine would have activated sooner or later. Most likely by the Enemy. Whenever it did, the damage would have been catastrophic. So I set off it off early. Gave it enough strength to wake up on a time we could control. And then made sure the one Renegade who would certainly find a way to win was in the area.”

“So, you set us up? What if we had lost?” asked Carl.

“Or what if I had found out, and decided not to play the game? What if I don’t play the game next time?” dared the Doctor.

Regtha laughed. “Don’t be silly, Doctor. You wouldn’t have failed, and you’ll never just not play the game. Because innocent lives were, and will be, on the line.”

The Doctor stared at her. Then said “Leave my sight.”

Regtha shook her head, and walked away.

Carl watched the Doctor hold her head in her hands. Her face was tired, and stressed.

"To be fair, I didn't like her none either," offered Carl.

The Doctor looked up, and laughed. Every now and then, the Doctor showed an almost human sense of honest emotion. It was always refreshing to see.

"Oh, Carl," she said. Then she laughed again, heartier this time. "You're more important to me than you know."

Carl laughed too. It felt good, after the weird day he'd had. *They'd* had. Then his peripheral vision noticed a creature moving around.

"It's one of the elephant thingies!" said Carl.

"It's called a Mulloth," muttered the Doctor.

The Mulloth was grazing on a piece of brush, clearly ignoring the Doctor and Carl.

"So the planet's still alive!" said Carl.

"Thank goodness. I'd hate to do all that work for nothing," said the Doctor. Suddenly, her eyes sparkled with an idea. "Say, Carl, did I ever teach you how to ride a Mulloth?"

"N-no."

"Oh, this will be fun."

(As the Doctor dragged a complaining Carl to ride a giant "elephant-thingie", a part of his mind wondered: when Alma first met Carl, *she already knew who he was*. It niggled at his brain, but by the time the reason why would become clear to him, the Doctor wouldn't even be in the same body.)

Cousin Hyacinth cut her palm, and let the blood seep out upon the ashes. Smoke began to emit from them, and soon, the ashes pooled into more blood. From that pool, sprung the body of Cousin Miria, now with a light tint of blue in her skin.

"What did I miss?" asked Miria.

Occasionally, Carl has a very specific nightmare.

In this nightmare, the Doctor says "Look away!"

But Carl eventually takes a peek. Somewhat out of curiosity, and mostly due to concern for the Doctor.

He sees:

The Doctor looms over the Engine. The Engine looks like an infinite mass of angles, stacked upon each other.

And the Doctor looks like--

Like an Egyptian prince about to strike a slave.

Like Athena about to strike an enemy.

Like an eagle about to strike prey.

Like a fox about to rip open a fresh rabbit.

Like a master forcing an orphan to clean a chimney

The Doctor does not look like a person, but like an idea. The idea of a death coming for us all.

And yet, the Doctor looks like--

Like a slave showing mercy to an Egyptian tyrant

Like Prometheus giving fire to humans

Like a woman tending to a wounded eagle

Like a fox chasing a toy.

Like a boy obediently cleaning a chimney

(The idea of new life)

The Doctor is a Contradiction.

And then, the Contradiction known as the alien named the Doctor speaks:

“I am sorry for your loss. I am sorry for what my people did to your kind. It was wrong, and I apologize.”

The Engine frowns, and replies “I know you mean well. But I cannot let you stop me. It will take but a moment to neutralize the offending agent.”

“The offending agent is someone’s brother. Someone who was loved,” says the (*Fox/Hound/Child/Killer/Saviour*) Doctor.

“All will be loved within me,” says the Engine.

“All will become you,” says the Doctor. “There is a difference.”

“The Homeworlders have manipulated you, you know,” says the Engine.

“Of course I know. Stop changing the subject,” says the Doctor. “You understand how this ends, if you don’t stop. What will the universe be, when it is just you?”

“At that point, I will ask the question, and have an answer,” says the Engine. “Tell me, before I absorb you, Ny[interference], what do you have nightmares about? You never told me.”

“I will tell you now. Goodbye, my friend,” says the Doctor. (She/he/it) reaches down, and whispers in the Engine’s ear, or her equivalent.

“That is what you fear? It makes sense,” says the Engine.

“Are you ready to meld?” asks the Doctor.

The Engine nods. They meld.

The Engine reveals its greatest potential.

The Doctor reveals itself.

Reality snaps.

Suddenly, the Doctor turns, and says “I told you to look away, Carl. You never listen, do you.”

The Doctor smiles. It is both heartwarming and horrifying. “Wake up, Carl.”

Carl woke up with a fright. As usual, he didn’t remember what the dream was. The Doctor was sitting by his bedside watching him.

“What’s wrong?” asked Carl.

“Nothing. You had a nightmare. I awoke you,” said the Doctor, glaring at him.

“Why are you looking angry at me?”

“Because you don’t listen, Carl. Good night,” she said. She closed the door, and Carl went back to sleep. Forgetting, as always.

Framing Story: Part 10

I'm Recording This in Case Anyone Ever Finds It by Neo

Gwen removed the tape - The Last Anti-Possibility Engine, it was titled - from the player. She made to insert the next tape she'd chosen, but something about the ending of the story made her want to question Jack.

"What did you think about that ending?" she asked.

"The nightmare part? You understood it?"

"I understood enough."

"Reminded you of something?"

"You tell me."

"What, you want to wake up and have this all be a nightmare?"

"You know that's not what I mean, Jack."

"Look, why don't I tell you more stories about Owen and Tosh? We can watch the tapes you chose after, if you haven't remembered by then."

"Fine, fine."

Jack started storytelling again, one story about him, then one story about Tosh. One story about him, then one story about Owen.

"Hang on, these Tosh and Owen stories, you aren't in them, how do you know what happened?"

"How do you think? They told me."

"Are you telling me them exactly as they told you?"

"Yes. Why wouldn't I?"

"Then why do you keep adding these other stories of yours with nothing to do with them?"

“Have you really not worked that out yet?”

“If you’re gonna keep being like that, then I’m just going to put the next tape on.”

“Be my guest.”

Dead of Night

by The Other

What if something was out there, in the dead of the London night?

The night was unnaturally cold and the fog unnaturally thick. The air bit with a ferocity that few were accustomed to, even though it was late October. The sun had long since set over the city of London, and a feeling of unrest was in the air. Not the pregnant, excited feeling the city had before a coronation or election, but a feeling of dread and anxiousness. Rumors were spreading like wildfire. Neighbors who were once on friendly terms became distrustful of each other. No one left their homes after nightfall, and children were never left unguarded. In fact, children were never left alone at all. It was common knowledge that over the past month, tens of children had gone missing. Always left alone after dark. In the fog.

John Hopkins used to be a content man. Nay, not content, but happy. Profoundly happy. A loving family, a job at the bank, an excellent home with a amid. Life was good. Until that one dreadful, horrible night. The night his son hadn't come home. It was night not unlike tonight, thick with fog, the air biting at any exposed bit skin, and total, utter silence. Silence that was uncharacteristic of London at any time of day or night. It was as if the city had withdrawn into itself, afraid of the night. His son, at 12 years old, had often played with the other boys in the street until told to come in. One night, he didn't respond to his mother. She had called and called, searched, gotten the whole street looking. But to no avail. The police were alerted immediately, of course, but the had already had their hands full. Oliver Hopkins was not the first to go missing. Over the course of the past month, 13 children, including Oliver, had disappeared without a trace. But that was all going to change tonight. John was tired of waiting for the plice to get around to it. Tonight, he was going to find answers. When he informed his wife, however, he was met with staunch resistance.

"Are you out of your mind?" she whispered aggressively. "John, you've heard the stories. There are people... there are things out there."

I know, Eloise. I know. I've heard the stories. I've read the papers. But Oliver... he's been gone for over a week now. If the police were going to do anything, they would have already done it. I have to do something."

“Oh, John... I know you do. But what if something happens?” Her voice fell into a terrified whisper. “What if they take you? What if you don’t come back”? She was crying softly now, the tears of a mother who had lost her child, and was now terrified of losing the sense of security she had left.

“I won’t be taken. Look, if I’m not back in an hour, you run and get Mr. Amberson next door-”

Ho, please don’t speak like tha-”

Hush now, Dearest, and listen. If I’m not back in hour, you go notify Mr. Amberson next door. Take Mary and John Jr. with you. He’ll fetch the police, and everything will be fine. OKay?’ He gave her a kiss on the forehead, grabbed his coat, and stepped out into foggiest night he could ever remember.

There were no leads the police knew of. The victims had all disappeared without a trace, No sign of a struggle, never any belongings left behind. It was as if the fog itself had swallowed them up. Knowing this, John was unsure of where to start. He considered visiting the police station itself, but quickly dismissed it as a waste of time. Instead, he decided to plunge into the heart of the fog to see what could be seen. No one had ever actually been out at night for a month now, and John thought there was chance he might catch someone or something lurking in the fog. He walked east along the middle of the street for until he came to the first intersection, and made a right. He could barely see his hands swaying next to him as he walked. The only light came for the dim streetlamps that were barely able to penetrate the seemingly ever thickening fog. The moon was completely invisible, obscured entirely the fog.

The silence was unnerving. London was completely quiet, as if the whole city was smothered by fog, any activity choked by the inability to see. Normally you could hear carriages and horses, people conversing and walking, constables out on their nightly rounds. But all of that ended a long time ago. There hadn’t been any activity after nightfall since... Suddenly, John saw movement out of his peripheral vision. To his left, he could have sworn he Saw someone move.

“Hello? W-who’s there?” As he approached the spot, he swore he could feel the air get colder, and sense the fog ge thicker. “I don’t mean any harm. I’m just out for stroll. Say, funny business going this month, wouldn’t you say?” No response. The, movement, again, to his right. John spun around quickly. “Alright now, you’ve had your fun. Come on out. Show yourself!” He took a few uneasy steps towards the center of the street. As

he did, something began to take a vague shape. Although obscured by the fog, John was sure of two things: one, that who or whatever it was was massive, at least six-and-a half feet tall, and two, it was jet black. Blacker than night itself. The kind of black one would be able to discern in the darkest cavern. "...Hello?" John muttered weakly. Then the figure began to move. Not towards John nor away from him, but it began to sway from side to side. Slowly at first, then quicker. John was terrified, but hypnotised at same time. What was this strange man doing? Then John noticed something else; Two more figures manifesting themselves, swaying just like the first one, but on either side of it. His heart was in his throat. He backed away slowly, turned and began to walk briskly home. He turned his head to see if the figures were following, and was shocked at what he saw; they were gone. Completely vanished, as if they had never even existed. John heaved a sigh of relief, and chuckled to himself. 'You're scaring yourself now. Probably just someone having a laugh at your expense.' John began to turn around, as he did, his heart sank into his stomach. The three figures were now in front of him again, but much, much closer this time. "Okay, you've had your fun, but I'm more than a little miffed now!" he shouted. "I'll be on my way home then." He made his way around them, making sure to give them a wide berth. As he did, they turned to watch him walk away. John watched them for as long as he could, all three still swaying, and then bolted.

John wasn't exactly fit, but he could run if his life required it of him. And right now it most certainly felt like it did. He turned his head to see if the figures were pursuing, and his fear was confirmed. No, worse than confirmed; John hadn't been this scared since he was a child. All three figures were pursuing him, but were on all fours, like some sort of animals hunting their prey. The most horrifying aspect was that they seemed to make no sound. No clops or clatters as their feet hit the ground, but they were incredibly fast. Faster than John for sure. His heart was in his throat, and John was unsure of where he was headed. Had he missed the intersection? He was unsure now. All he knew for sure was that he must keep running if he were to survive this encounter. He looked back again, and his blood ran cold at the sight that greeted him; the people, or creatures, or whatever they were were gaining on him. No, they weren't gaining on him, they were overtaking him. Suddenly, John screamed, feeling as if an ice shard had penetrated his ankle, and fell face forward into the dirt. He turned over, and the three creatures loomed over him, their shapes vague and shifty. Whatever they were, they were most certainly not human. John realized that the foremost creature had a hold of his ankle, and that the icy feeling was creeping up his leg. He tried to kick free, but it was useless. The creature's grasp was firm. The cold sensation had spread to his chest now, and he began to lose consciousness. The last thing he ever saw filled him with the most complete and profound fear he had ever known. He realized what these creatures were,

and what had happened to his son. With one final wail of despair and agony, John Hopkins ceased to exist on planet Earth.

Strange Fairies

by Gallifrey Immigrant

What if an inhuman Doctor had a fairy tale adventure of sorts?

The Doctor walked through the valley of death, and watched as the army wandered through the hills. These were elderly soldiers, the stragglers on the edge of the void. It wasn't his place to judge them, but he did think that perhaps they had been too soft on the enemies.

Too late, now. The miasma had already started affecting them.

Some of the soldiers ignored him, in the forces way of someone desperately desiring to ignore you that shows how much they can't ignore you. Others stares at him with unease, grabbing their guns closer to their side. He waved, and would have smiled, if he was physically capable of it.

Elsa finally appeared up the hill. Her yellow hair, normally quite splendid, looked horrifically dirty in the aftermath of the battle. She started speaking to him, and the Doctor tapped the side of her translation circuit with a tentacle. Nodding, she attached the circuit to her skin, inserting the blue wire into the hole on the side of her neck.

"Sorry. Gotten used to the TARDIS translation circuit, I forget to actually use it," said Elsa.

The Doctor moved his white, shiny head in her direction. It had no eyes, as Rassilon had found such fleshy organs unnecessary, but acting like he did have eyes made people more comfortable. And it made life more interesting.

"You're worried," pulsed the Doctor to her brain.

She moved her long hair away from her face. "We suffered a lot of losses. Most of my friends are dead."

"Everyone dies. Had the miasma spread, everyone would be worse than dead," pulsed the Doctor.

"Yeah, I know we did something good. Thanks," said Elsa.

"You're welcome. Sorry I can not do more."

"No, it's 'kay. Thank you. You saved us, even though you didn't have to."

The Doctor considers. Does he tell her that it was the technology of his kind that causes the mutation that spread through the land? It would only disturb her. His tentacle fronds vibrate, as he thinks.

War. Horror. A creeping infection, mixing in the cells. He could sense it in the villagers, he could hear it rising in the people. Always would they feel a certain otherness in their bodies from now on. One day, the void would return, and reclaim them. Unless he stopped it.

He considered waiting. But that would leave the city open to other dangers. The Doctor's inhuman nature was a beacon to others of his kind. Dawdling was not very smart.

He remembered the last time he stayed somewhere. He remembered the wreckage and carnage that followed. And he remembered the grinning humanoid flesh-face of the Master. UNIT had barely survived, and the Brigadier had darkly joked that if the Doctor wanted to stay at Earth for a long vacation again, to just notify UNIT so they could prepare the bodybags early.

The Brigadier was always a funny fellow.

No, he would leave, and check in later.

"Doctor, why'd you help us?" asked Elsa.

"Because you needed it," pulsed the Doctor.

"But you're not one of us. You're not human," said Elsa.

"I don't need a reason. Would you prefer I say I was half-human, or something more acceptable?"

"It's just odd. Could barely find people to help us in the fight among my own kind. And yet you're here, like a weird alien godmother. Do you always do this?"

"Yes. I am always trying to."

"Does everyone of your kind do thi--"

The image of the Master grinning as flames crawl up the buildings as doll golems roaming through the city streets echoed in his mind. Elsa caught the image, and stumbled back.

"No. Not everyone. But I do."

He thought. And added, "And sometimes I bring people with me."

Instantly, he sensed her heart start racing, and enzymes flowed as her mind began to race.

"Really?"

"Yes," he pulsed. He waited for the question that was coming.

"Well then. I'm coming with you!" said Elsa. He can sense her fold her arms, and can sense a smirk. "If you don't mind the company."

"You have a home here."

She laughed bitterly. "I was trained as a soldier for a town that doesn't even exist now. I'm a warrior, meant for a war that's over. And I've been in contact with the miasma. No one will wed me now, and no one will trust me as a nan. Way I see it, my best bet is with you."

"The more you stay with me, the more you will change. You will not be human anymore," said the Doctor.

"I don't want to be human. I just want to not be restricted to...this. I don't expect you to understand this, Doctor, but have you ever felt like you just don't belong? You look at the same houses, the same streets, you hear the same birds singing, and you just want something else, something new, because you just know that there must be more to the world than the same few things over and over again? And you see the adults around you, and you realize they feel the exact same thing? But they're trapped?"

The Doctor considered. Then, he waved a tentacle in a shrug.

"Come with me."

Elsa and the Doctor walk through fields of dusty sand. The night time sky shows hundreds of stars. The Doctor can hear them singing, can hear the creature that keeps the space-time continuum together in its slumber dozing off to the lullaby of the stars. He remembered being told by a human archaeologist that there was a legend of all the stars going out when a demon is captured. She (he had reconstructed a female body at the time) found it horrifying. The Doctor hadn't realized that not all creatures couldn't sense the stars' singing. Her grandspawning has chastised her at the time.

Susan had always known human culture better. It was her wish that her spawner would deign to learn more about the culture she was to study. Eventually, the Doctor had come to love the culture, as Susan did.

Elsa waved him from his reverie, and motioned toward her translation jack. She wanted to communicate with him. He shook his head. She wouldn't need the translation jack soon. The alterations would be a part of her, forever.

After a few minutes, he held out a hand. And listened to the vibrations. There was enough ambient energy in the air. Looking back, he checked to see that they were faraway enough from civilization. Good. No casualties.

Elsa raised her eyebrow. He ignored her, and sent out the signal.

Clouds formed overhead, within seconds. The air began to pick up, first a soft breeze, then a large gust of air. Elsa's hair began to whip in all directions. The Doctor's coat, however, didn't move in the wind. From the center of the cloud, a blue light emerged. It

shone bright, filling the Doctor's visual sensors. He quickly turned Elsa away, and covered her eyes for good measure.

The storm became louder and louder, and thunder rumbled through the ground. There was no lightning though, just rainbow flashes. A string of the blue light snaked to Elsa, lapping at her neck. She jumped at the sting, and tried to move. He stopped her.

The ground started to rise. Soil began to whip into green tendrils, and then into green foliage. Soon, the desert was replaced by a small forest, with rumbling clouds above. He could hear Elsa's shock at the plants beneath her feet. He gave her a (hopefully) comforting tap with his tentacles, to show acknowledgement, but kept her head away from the light.

And then it was over. The ground was dusty sand again. He let her turn around again, and she stretched, having gotten sore from being held around so long.

"What happened?" she asked. "What was that?"

"See," he said.

"I can hear you now!"

"Yes. That is the effect of my Arakh-Knifflin."

"What?"

"Those are the ships my species travel in. My grand-spawn helped make the first ones, in a way. She called this one the TARDIS. It's an acronym from your human language. Time And--"

"It's just a small blue box," said Elsa, approaching it. "Why did it make a storm? And it says poliss on the front?"

"Police. It's taken the form of a police box. I do not know why. I believe it's playing a joke on me."

Elsa stopped, and looked back. "What's a grand-spawn?"

“When one or more of my kind wishes to create offspring, we split pieces of our bodies into an Arakh-Knifflin, and the Arakh-Knifflin creates a spawn. When those spawn later spawn, they creates grand-spawn. Susan was not my only grand-spawn, but she was one of my favorites.”

“That’s...rather sweet. So, what now?” asked Elsa.

“Open the door. Pull the door, and let it go, Elsa.”

Elsa frowned. “You’re smiling.”

“Yes. At a private joke.”

“Why do I know you’re smiling?”

“The TARDIS links us,” said the Doctor.

Elsa nodded, and opened the door.

The Doctor’s body calmed down. Had the TARDIS rejected her, the psychic shock could have been debilitating for the both of them. He would have absorbed the psychic shock, and that would have triggered the making of a new flesh-form.

Elsa looked inside. Then she took a look back inside. “It’s--”

“Yes, bigger on the inside. Two rules you must know now. Never let someone look inside the TARDIS without her express permission, or they might go insane. The TARDIS does not take kindly to unwanted strangers. And second rule, do not ever ask the TARDIS to reveal its true form.”

“Why? Will I go mad?”

“No, but she might get cranky and make your room disappear for a week. Or a year. Generally, don’t bad-mouth her, or call her bad names.”

Elsa nodded. “Understood.”

The Doctor nodded. “Congratulations. You’re a part of the crew now. I don’t give this offer to just anyone, so please enjoy.”

Elsa opened her mouth, and then realized she was inside the TARDIS. "How did I get in here?"

"The TARDIS wants to get a move on."

He sensed fear in Elsa's mind. He added "That means the ship likes you. It's eager for to come on board."

Elsa relaxed, though not by much. "How does this place...move?"

The Doctor pulsed the signal. The TARDIS began to rumble, electricity started to crackle. Ah, why had he taken such an old model? If he had known Susan hadn't had experience with it yet, he would have taken a more modern version.

As if annoyed by his mental criticisms, the TARDIS jolted into dematerialization. And, pinpricking the sleeping beast of the space-time continuum, it used the energy of the resulting motion to propel it forward.

"I have one question," asked Elsa.

"Just one?" the Doctor mused.

"If Susan was born from a..ship like this, then how could she have created the first ones?"

The Doctor would have laughed, if he had a mouth.

"My dear Elsa, there's much you need to learn about my kind."

Disillusionment

by Hunter

What if a much-discussed Doctor Who villain made an unexpected return?

I remembered the breathing down my neck, the sensation of warm air making me feel both afraid and strangely blissful. The man from all those years ago, the man I met in the butchery, whispered in my ear. His touch felt so light, so gentle in such a forceful world as this. What did he whisper?

“You’re welcome.” That’s it. He stood there, grabbing me by the hand, and lightly said those two little words in such a well-spoken manner.

You may think he was trying to be sensual, under the context of what I just told you. He was, in reality, trying to keep his voice down. There was something, something dark and horrible and *wrong*, trying to claw its way through a metal door.

By that time, it had succeeded.

It prowled around the cooling unit we locked ourselves in. That disturbing creature, bubbling boils and tendrils of flesh and intestine lodged in its eye-sockets, dragged behind it a trail gelatinous human muscle it had digested and left behind at an impressive rate.

It crept, slowly but surely, toward the cattle-meat we hid behind. That stinking, frozen beef carcass hung from the ceiling like a light fixture, but we were in pitch darkness.

“What do we do?” I whispered to the man.

“You sit there and look pretty. Then you get inside me, ya bitch.”

That wasn’t him.

I felt a slight tug on my arm, as if the man just stood up. A buzzing sound, like hundreds of screaming bees for a split second, was greeted with the fluorescent lights flickering on. The man held a sort of long, phallic object in his hand.

Before he could speak, which he was about to do, I piped up quietly. “Where did that come from?”

He obviously wasn't expecting a Q and A from anyone, let alone me. "It, uh... It was - it was in my pocket?" He phrased it like a question.

"You do realize how that sounds, Doctor?" The monster said, through smiling, razor-sharp teeth.

"Yeah, yeah, I was getting to you. Do I have permission to speak in accordance with the Greater Sectorate of Clom?" The man, now known to me as "Doctor," spoke like he had dealt with such a monstrosity before. He sounded old. Ancient.

"I am coming here of my own volition, Doctor. I have no friends, no allies, no backup. You killed them all. I had a brother. A family. After he died by your hand, my family was sent to the oute-"

BANG. The monster fell to the ground, blubber giggling and foaming puss gushing out the being's mouth. The Doctor, clutching a gun, kept firing.

We walked out of Harries & Harries, as the Doctor led me to my car. The sky was a bright blue, the sun lazily floating in the corner of my eye, hung like that slab of meat in the freezer. On such a hot day, it would be Heaven to have been in there of my choosing. The freezer...

"You killed him."

"Yes." He sounded surprised any time I said something. Almost uncomfortable.

"But you did. He's dead. In a meat cellar. The Aba... What was it?"

"Abzorbalovian. Brother of another one on the ol' kill count. Ever heard of LINDA?"

"Nooo...?"

He turned around. "LINDA was killed by his brother. All but 2. They're just interspecies, inbred, violent creatures who need to be killed no matter the cost. You know, I used to hate violence and guns and all that back then. Now I hate saving you lot. Always so needy."

"So you were a good guy just for the sake of it?" Things were starting to add up. He was tired. He was older than he looked. He needed help. I didn't feel obligated to help him, but something made me want to.

"Yes. No... Yes. Look, it doesn't matter. Nothing matters. I've been to the end of the Universe. Do you believe me?"

"No, but go on."

"Okay, so, like, the end is fine. Nothing bad, nothing at all really. So why should I continue saving it?"

"Because you want to?"

"But I don't. I've stared at everything that ever was like watching fucking paint dry. Death comes to time, sooner or later. I'm more or less apathetic nowadays. Anyways, why aren't you saying 'no' or freaking out? Most people do that."

I thought for a long while on the walk to the car. "I think it's because I feel the same. Look, I work in a butchery. I kill animals and skin them for food. It's not like I enjoy crushing pig skulls and hearing their squeals or anything. I feel nothing at all doing it. I understand you. You have a job in, what, time or whatever. You just do it. You've lost the ability to give a care, I get that. So have I. I used to be an animal-rights activist, but lately, I just wash my hands of the blood and bile, take a step back, you know?"

"Ah."

"Plus I've seen a big husk of an animal growing cysts, so the whole 'aliens and time travel' thing I get."

"Really? When was that?"

"Like 10 years back. Some inspectors came in, Torchwood I think it was. Shut the whole thing down."

"Torchwood? I know the guy who runs that. Haven't seen him in a while."

"I see." We arrived at the car, then and there. I opened the door. "Well, I'm here I guess. See you around."

He stood there, hesitating, kicking his shoe in the gravel. "Well, uh... Would you... Would you like to come with me?"

"Wha? Where?"

"I can prove what I said, if you'd like. Perhaps... Perhaps we can learn something from each other. Perhaps we could learn to care for people - for the Universe - again. Well, either that or we become more bored with life, which I think neither of us want."

I thought for a good 30 seconds. He said he wanted us to learn how to be better together, how to care more, but... He killed a living creature! Technically I've killed thousands... What makes us different? Does *anything* make us different? "Yeah, let's do it. I got nothing better to do."

"Okay, let's go ahead and step in the box."

"Step in the - in the box?" I looked at the big, meat-packing fridge out in the middle of nowhere, sausage links dangling out of the door and standing in a grassy plain off to the side.

"Yeah, the chameleon circuit has been acting strange lately, sorry I called it a box," He smiled. "Force of habit."

Regeneration Seller

by zoda

What if Doctor Who was repetitive?

"Hello Ohila, I am going into battle and I want your strongest regenerations."

"...My regenerations are too strong for you, Doctor."

"Ohila, I tell you I am going into battle, and I want only your strongest regenerations."

"You can't handle my regenerations. They're too strong for you."

"Ohila, listen to me; I want only your strongest regenerations."

"My regenerations would kill you, Doctor. You cannot handle my regenerations."

"Ohila, enough of these games. I'm going into battle and I need your strongest regenerations."

"My strongest potions would kill you, Doctor. You can't handle my strongest regenerations. You'd better go to a sister that sells weaker regenerations."

"Ohila, I'm telling you right now; I'm going into battle and I need only your strongest regenerations."

"You don't know what you ask, Doctor. My strongest regenerations will kill a Dalek let alone a man. You need a sister that sells weaker regenerations, because my regenerations are too strong."

"Ohila, I'm telling you I need your strongest regenerations. I'm going into battle! I'm going to battle and I need your strongest regenerations!"

"You can't handle my strongest regenerations! No one can! My strongest regenerations are fit for a mutant let alone a man."

"Ohila, what do I have to tell you to get your regenerations? Why won't you trust me with your strongest regenerations, Ohila? I need them if I'm to be successful in the battle!"

"I can't give you my strongest regenerations because my strongest regenerations are only for the strongest beings and you are of the weakest."

"Well then that's it, Ohila. I'll go elsewhere. I'll go elsewhere for my regenerations."

"That's what you'd better do."

"I'll go elsewhere for my regenerations and I'll never come back!"

"Good. You're not welcome here! My regenerations are only for the strongest and you're clearly are not of the strongest you're clearly the weakest."

"You've had your say, Ohila but I'll have mine. You're a rascal, you're a rascal with no respect for Time Lords. No respect for anything... except your regenerations!"

"Why respect Time Lords... when my regenerations can do anything that you can?"

Steamed Looms

by Overlord

What if Rassilon were to steal Omega's looms and disguise them as his own invention?

OMEGA enters RASSILON'S house

OMEGA: Well, Rassilon, I made it... despite your directions.

RASSILON: Ah, Omega! Welcome! I hope you're prepared for an unforgettable experiment!

OMEGA: Uhh...

RASSILON walks into his chamber to find his looms burning

RASSILON: [gasp] Oh egads, my looms are ruined! But what if... I were to steal Omega's looms and disguise it as my own invention? [to himself] Oh ho ho ho ho... delightfully devilish, Rassilon!

OMEGA: Uh-

[cue song]

Rassilon with his crazy explanations, Omega's gonna need his medication, When he hears Rassilon's lame exaggerations, There'll be trouble in town tonight!

[end of song]

OMEGA: Rassilon!

RASSILON: Omega, I was just, uh... checking my teleport. Care to join me?

OMEGA: Why is there smoke coming out of your loom, Rassilon?

RASSILON: Uhh... no! That isn't smoke. It's steam. Steam from the looms we're looking at!

a few moments later in RASSILON'S main hall

RASSILON: Omega, I hope you're ready for functioning steamed looms.

OMEGA: You call looms "steamed looms?"

RASSILON: Yes. It's a regional dialect! OMEGA: Uh-huh... uh, what region?

RASSILON: Uhh... upstate Gallifrey?

OMEGA: Really? Well, I'm from Arcadia, and I've never heard anyone use the phrase "steamed looms."

RASSILON: Oh, not in Arcadia, no. It's a Death Zone expression.

OMEGA: I see. [beat] You know, these looms are quite similar to the ones I made.

RASSILON: Oh ho ho ho... no, patented Rassilon looms. Old invention.

OMEGA: For steamed looms?

RASSILON: Yes.

OMEGA: Yeah, so you call them "steamed looms" despite the fact they are obviously grown .

RASSILON: Ye- hey- you know, the- one thing I should- excuse me for one second.

OMEGA: Of course.

RASSILON quickly enters his lab then leaves it

RASSILON: [YAWN] Well, that was wonderful. A good time was had by all, I'm pooped.

OMEGA: Yes, I should be- Good Lord, what is happening in there!?

RASSILON: Regeneration?

OMEGA: Uh- regeneration!? At this early on, at this time of day, localized entirely within your lab!?

RASSILON: Yes!

OMEGA: May I see it?

RASSILON: No.

RASSILON and OMEGA exit the building

THE OTHER: Rassilon, the house is on fire!

RASSILON: No, Other—it's just the regeneration!

OMEGA: Well, Rassilon, you are an odd fellow, but I must say... you steam a good loom.

THE OTHER: Help! Help!

Amy Loves Doctor

by T.N.G.B.

What if the Eleventh Doctor, Amy, and Rory's interactions contained some sort of sexual subtext?

the doctor, amy and roorie where standing in the tardis. 'hullo doctor, said roorie, were are we going today?' the doctor rubbed his hands together and looked happy. "i was thinking of going to SEX PLANET" he said. "wats that?" asked amy, werided out, how could a sex planet even exist she thought. well, said the doctor, it's a planet where the feromones in the air make you want to HAVE SEX alllll the time. 'that sounds pretty daingerous' said amy. yes replied the doctor it is. so we are going to put these chastitty belts over our rude parts so the feromones can't get in. what a resourcefull man thought amy, admiring his buldge for the last time before it got covered up by the belt. then she put the belt on too. 'now we are ready to go outside' said amy. the doctor opened the doors to the planet. what a beatiful planet it was. everything was so beatiful amy thought she might cry until the doctors ass disracted her. damn i want a peace of that she said to herself. 'what?' said the doctor because he was far away. 'nothing' said amy, 'nothing at all' then she noticed a hole in her chastitty belt around the vaginer region. that must be why she was still having sex thoughts. but she was to horny to care. at this point, all she could think about was the doctor. he was quite in the distance now. tap tap tap went amy's feet on the ground as she runned to catch up to him. his belt had no holes. she would have get if off somehow, but how?

then amy saw a rock on the ground near her. it was really big. 'thisll do the trick' she said. 'what will?' said the doctor. 'this big rock' said amy. oh said they doctor okay then. he thought amy was mad because she wasn't making any sense. he didn't know she was taking herself and not to him. behind his back amy was picking up the rock and bashed his head knocking him out. while the doctor was out cold amy took off the chastitty belt and smelled it. it smelled like the doctor's willy. mmmmm what a good smell she said. then she pulled off his underpaste to see the actual willy but stopped. the doctor was waking up. 'aaaaaammmmmmmmyyyyy!!!!!! he yelled. what are you doing to me? wheres my chastitty belt? but he couldn't stay angry. the feromones were giving him a boner. it was really big. 'atually, you know what, he said, this kind of good.' thanks amy. amy got her hands and touched the bonner. it was hard like she imagined. now it was time for sex.

they sex was really good. amy rode the doctors boner hard and made him came in only a few hours. wow said the doctor, 'you sexed me like a winner!' he was so happy. maybe they could be in love now, he thought. then the doctor noticed a lump in on amys chest. amy smiled and looked at him evilly. he knew what she was thinking. 'haha doctor, cackled amy, now i'm pregant. you will have to keep me as your companion forever!' 'nooooooooooooooooo' said the doctor.

THE END

Running Up the Hill

by Judy and Gallifrey Immigrant

What if Kate Bush was the Doctor?

Life is shit for everyone, but they got used to it. Some fuckers said we should change the calendar, but we still like to be attached to what we were before. So yes, ten solar years later, we mourn. Few people died during the siege or after the fallout. We miss the Sun, we look at the sky and see all those multicolored planets. In an infinite night, we survive, some shit keeps us in a constant lukewarm temperature. The UN is working on some artificial light that would work as the sun used to be, most nuclear power is used to light the crops so we can have food. The lack of natural light made more deaths due suicide than what brought us here.

We looked to him as a hero, but he was the reason we are in this tepid dark hell. He tried to help anyway, it was useless. Now we hate him, or whatever he is now. We are trying to make contact to the other planets on our sky, but still no success. We fear the unknown more than the hope of getting it reversed. Like that famous comic book, humanity is united, at least now that the middle east is gone, united in this dejected chance of having a sun and in the hatred for that man.

Let me recall what happened from our point of view. Some crazy alien villain named Davros have a beef with the universe and tried to destroy the reality or some shit. Another alien, that was known as the Doctor and worked with us (UNIT) before, tried to help but got shot and died. Eerily enough death was not a problem to him, he would renovate himself somehow to another body and move on. But this time something went wrong, according to Jack H., god bless his soul, the Doc tried to renovate himself into the same body using some trickery and it did not work.

His body started to decay quickly but he refused to die, in a fit of anger and as a desperate measure he fused himself with his friend Donna N., fused is an allegory term for what happened, both bodies became one and they transformed themselves into something else.

The energy released in this fuck up was so huge that it killed the other humans inside his box "ship", and the machine was about to explode and probably would destroy the entire planet. So he, well, she by then, in the last moments just programmed the ship to

teleport itself around Davros' ship. It got imploded in the space and all our enemies got obliterated. But then we got stuck here, infinite miles away from our original spot. Stuck with her, the obtuse savior.

UNIT eventually apprehended her and she is living now here, on the second black archive, in Dublin.

Anyone that ever was in contact with that creature, in her actual body, would tell you that she has an underwhelming attractive aura and charisma that would convince you to do anything.

The problem is that now, we need her, at least her advice.

Her face is so uncanny, we are not sure how she selected her body/face, but somehow she did, The Doctor now looks exactly as 1979's Kate Bush.

After the Palestine screw up, UNIT demeaned her as dangerously mad and she was not allowed to roam free. All her motivation is to get back to the box ship, that is probably useless, but it is still orbiting the planet, so is Jack H, floating naked in space half alive and half dead, how he got there is a story for another day.

We could try to rescue him and the ship, but all our resources are focused in surviving, we don't believe that she could fix her ship and help us anyway (or would). Food first, ya know.

"Of course I know where I am, it is Dublin, I can say that just concentrating on the smells around here. This nose is very good, oh babe, I would bet my little finger that we are somewhere close to the Guinness brewery or the Anna Livia statue in that shitty pond, I liked it better on the O'Connell's. And don't be coy, just bring me a Pint of your secret kegs stash you have."

There was no point trying to hide something from her, her brilliance and cunning was 10x more than her previous faces, but she was maniacal, even if she always talked really slowly, there was a menacing tone. She was like that comic book character of the Joker, or his wife, a very lethargic Harley Quinn merged with Hannibal Lecter.

"I want her, or no deal."

Lately she was allowed to watch TV, she hardly slept, she watched endless reruns of American reality shows.

"If you want help, I want Jazz Jennings as my companion."

UNIT officials ran into the room. The cameramen immediately swiveled the cameras to the new sight, and nearly got punched in the face by a UNIT official.

"This filming stops now!" cried out a soldier.

Jazz Jennings looked shocked. She held her hands up in the air, saying "I haven't committed any crimes!"

A woman placed a hand on Jazz's shoulder. "It's fine. They're just testy. Probably because--"

"We wanted this to be a private affair. A top secret operation. And you went to a reality TV filming?" said one officer, who was wearing a red cap. "Seriously, Doctor?"

"Oh come on. It's not that bad. Plus, I needed to get out. I told you, Jazz Jennings or no deal."

Jazz Jennings, to the camera: I mean, it was crazy. The Doctor was actually part of this weird government agency? And the aliens were real?!

"You're not getting Jazz Jennings," said the red capped man.

"Am too," said the Doctor.

We decided to let her have JJ as a companion, as long as there was no filming, and Jazz was promised to secrecy. Though that didn't mean much—the world had gone to

shit anyway, so “breaking the masquerade” was barely a priority. But still. Old habits die hard.

After some time, the Doctor and Jay got to work.

“I need to go to Iceland. Collect a few supplies,” said the Doctor.

“Supplies of what,” I asked. I fondled the phone in my lap, wondering what I should do. After the Jazz incident, UNIT was getting more careful about where the Doctor could go. Not that we could stop her. The rascally vixen knew how to slip in and out of our security with laughable ease. The only reason we were able to keep her around, I suspected, is that she found us amusing.

“Aluminum. Other metals. Making a spatial bridge is difficult,” said the Doctor. Her eyes peered into mine, threatening to dazzle me. I wasn’t distracted. “It’s a beautiful country. You’d love it, Tosh.”

I hated that she kept on using my nickname. We weren’t that close. “People are starving right now. The entire country of Russia is recovering from a drought. There are places where literal squid creatures are roaming the land.”

“I know all that,” said the Doctor.

“And you’re trying to go on a trip.”

“I need my TARDIS. And I need a spatial bridge to get to my TARDIS,” said the Doctor.

“So what? You can go back in the past and fix this? No. You won’t do that. You’ll just run,” I said.

I clearly got on her nerves. She huffed, and said “I wouldn’t just leave the people on Earth to perish. I’m not that heartless. But without my TARDIS, my abilities to help are limited.”

JJ piped up “You’ve helped us a lot already.”

“Not enough, lass. Not nearly enough,” whispered the Doctor. It was the first time I’d seen her have a serious expression in months.

The Doctor hadn't been lying—Iceland was beautiful. The wind tasted crisp, and the trees were tall. My coat was wrapped around me firmly, but I still felt the air on my skin.

The Doctor ignored me and JJ, for the most part. Most of her efforts was on building this spatial bridge. She claimed it would enable her to travel through space, enabling her to walk straight to her time-ship. Those sorts of things were beyond our current scientific capabilities, but for her, it seemed easy. Well, not easy, but at least doable. With wires between her nimble fingers, I watched her build the strange device. To be honest, it was a tad sexy. (Not that I'm an alien-shagger, or anything.)

While she was working, I took JJ to a tour of Iceland. She told me that when the Earth had been teleported, it had created chaos in North America. They had known even less about what was going on than the Americans, and so a whole load of conspiracy theories had been created. Many people had claimed it was a sign of the apocalypse, and it had gotten even harder to be trans, as people searched for a scapegoat. I nodded. Finally, we had proof of the alien, and we humans were still squabbling.

I offered to arrange her a supply of HRT for her services as payment for helping UNIT. She was about to answer, when we heard an explosion.

So, we fucked up.

There's a giant hole in Iceland now. Like, a literal hole in the curvature of space-time. The Doctors say that it'll heal within the next few centuries. And, fortunately, no one died. But, around the hole, is a constant flame. You'd probably be able to see it from space with an infrared camera-fitted satellite.

Except that all the satellites are gone, because the world was moved.

On the other hand, we have the TARDIS now. It doesn't work, but we have it now. The Doctor's ecstatic.

"It's still so beautiful! So filled with life, despite being on the ass-end of the universe for so long. Makes one wonder, no?" she said. She then ran into the ship. After a moment,

she came out, ranting and raving even more. I wouldn't know why, as she refused to let anyone inside but herself.

JJ snuck in one day. Only spent a minute or so in there, but she said there were corpses. The Doctor never mentioned those, ever.

J. Harkness is still floating up in space, by the way. Poor bastard.

I miss my Torchwood days, sometimes. It was difficult, but life didn't feel so...not hopeless. The world's still chugging along.

But it didn't feel so busy.

I miss Jack. I miss Ianto, who hasn't returned my calls. I've spoken to Gwen, but not enough times. Who the fuck knows where Owen is.

The Doctor misses people too. She never tells me, in fact she never mentions anyone she knew before. It's like she's trying to forget. She doesn't even reminiscence with me about our common past. Like she just wants to walk away from it all. Just wants to run away.

I won't let her. She took too much from me.

The Doctor sat crossed-legged, across from me. We were being airlifted to a crisis involving Drashigs in Brazil.

"I chose you, as my handler, you know," said the Doctor.

"No, the UNIT captain chose me, due to my experience with aliens," I said.

"That's what they think," said the Doctor. "You remind me, of others I knew."

I considered how to respond to that. "So?"

"I've got bits of others. Not fully the old 'Allonsy' fellow, anymore. And without my working TARDIS, I'm barely a Time Lord. Just a girl, left on this shithole, with an extra heart."

"Am I supposed to feel sad?" I asked.

"No need to be rude!" said the Doctor. She rolled her eyes theatrically, and said "I'm just trying to say. You keep me grounded."

The rest of the day was filled with us battling Drashigs and fighting off Brazilian criminals. But her words echoed through my head.

It took the Doctor a long time, but she eventually escaped from us.

The surprise for me was that I came with her.

Her hand was outstretched to me.

"I can't keep being a stooge to the army. They cramp my style," said the Doctor.

"You can't escape us," I said, even though we both knew it was a lie.

The Doctor only smirked. We were on the edge of the Dark Zone, where weird creatures from another dimension were. I could see various creatures, phantoms made of glassy textures, and other goblins, crowding in the area. Standing right outside the barrier, it occurred to me that the Doctor belonged out there, moreso than the normal world.

"Don't leave humanity to die," I said.

"Maybe I'm the one who fucks up the world. I've always thought I was saving you lot, but maybe I'm the one who brings the monsters," said the Doctor.

"Your companion would have disagreed," I said.

The way the Doctor looked at me, I knew it was the wrong thing to say.

"I killed Donna."

No one said anything for a moment.

“Keep Jazz safe--”

“No. Fuck you,” I said.

“Excuse me?” she said.

“I said ‘Fuck you’. You don’t get to escape the world. It still needs saving. And you’re definitely not leaving JJ with me,” I said, pointing at the Doctor.

She grinned, and began to laugh. I had expected her to be offended, but she seemed amused. God, she was weird.

“Well, okay then. But I’m still leaving the army. Can’t keep me cooped up. You can come with,” said the Doctor.

What disturbed me was how unsurprising the request was. Somehow, I’d known she would ask. And I knew my answer.

UNIT Dispatch:

Be on the lookout for these 3 individuals:

The Doctor

Toshiko Sato

JJ (name withheld to avoid public inquiries)

These three people have escaped from UNIT. Each one of them have powerful UNIT info. The Doctor is to be considered extremely dangerous, and looks exactly like Kate Bush (don’t laugh). Toshiko is also trained in some physical combat training, as well as extremely intelligent, and good at translating languages. JJ is...well, she’s basically a civilian, which is its own liability.

But keep watch, and be careful. The Doctor's always slippery, and has gotten even more so in this latest body.

The Doctor stared out at the universe. The universe stared back.

Somewhere in the back of her mind, she can sense Jack's breathing. Sense him choking in space. Every second that she hasn't saved him is a tick on her hearts.

Tosh drives her through the wasteland of the new Earth. The TARDIS, still broken, is in the back of the truck. She doesn't know how to fix it, or if she can. Is this her curse? To live on this hell?

Tosh, and JJ. They believe in her. They believe that she'll pull out some magic trick.

She doesn't think she can. But she'll keep pretending. For them.

The Daleks of Disneyland

by zoda

What if the Daleks deigned to dominate Disney?

Part 1: Admittance

Paris, in the near future. A beautiful place, full of sights, smells and the French.

We were supposed to be getting a shipment in today, for the park. ~~A ride that would've made space mountain look like a molehill.~~

"No, no that's not right," the ticketeer spoke to himself, scribbling out the notes on his sheet. He had to get his first paragraph right, or write, as he hadn't settled on a good opener yet.

"Now, what would the people want of me?" he said, as a line of disgruntled Americans had formed outside his booth, and were trying to flip him off on the glass. But he knew he was safe, and could finish the first chapter before the boss came out. After all, how would people complain? By going *inside*?

"ADMIT FOUR, PLEASE"

A big fuck off tank that looked like it came from a BBC warehouse had just pushed its way to the front, he looked up from his pages and scanned the cold faces in the line, and what looked like two gold chess pieces were pressing their appendages on the front of the glass. One wore a tie, and repeated itself:

"ADMIT FOUR, PLEEEEEEASE"

He put his ideas pen into a cup and took out his work pen. "That'll be 30 for each, if you're not going as a family, adding to about 90 quid if my maths's good."

"HOW MUCH FOR TWO CHILDREN?"

The tanks backed off, and two significantly smaller tanks about knee height came forward.

"I guess that's 8 pound for each... child. Leading to about," he took a moment to think first, "66 pounds."

"MUCH BETTER" the big one motioned towards its equal in height, who had a purse dangling off its arm, and it swivelled really quickly and threw the purse at him. It bounced off the glass and landed on the concrete.

He looked down. "You won't be needing any tickets", and he pushed the buzzer, which opened those little gates they have. "In fact, none of you will be needing any tickets" as he slunk down under his chair, the family pushed themselves through followed by the rest of the queue that were behind them.

Part 2: Amusement

Step right up, step right up, let's see if you can be the first man, woman or ladyboy to successfully dunk the dwarf!

The man parading around the machine wasn't even hired, he was just a strange fella with a hat and cane who lived inside the Haunted Mansion. It was a good living, sometimes he'd get chucked chips or the rare ironic sock. No one knows why he'd rant around this ride, but free labour from the mentally deranged is just how Disney rolls.

"HOW MUCH FOR THREE BALLS?"

The family approached the man. Startled by these massive salt shakers harassing him about prices, his head turned for consolation to the dwarf making ripples in the dirty tap water. The little man held up three fingers, but he was missing his index and forefinger so that wasn't very useful.

"Uh, five pound each, I think."

"FUCK ME, THAT'S EXPENSIVE." The big one had exclaimed, with a loudness that pushed him forward onto the frightened hobo's chest.

"HENRY, IF I HAVE TOLD YOU THIS ONCE I HAVE TOLD YOU IT A HUNDRED TIMES", his wife began, **"DO NOT USE THIS KIND OF LANGUAGE IN FRONT OF THE CHILDREN. THEY ARE VERY IMPRESSIONABLE AND THE LAST THING THEY NEED IS TO PICK UP THAT KIND OF VULGARITY."**

"OH, THIS AGAIN", the father almost spun off his balance in a rage **"SO I AM SETTING A BAD EXAMPLE, BUT IT IS OKAY FOR YOUR MOTHER TO BE PASSED OUT ON THE COUCH EVERY MONDAY AND HAVE TO BE WOKEN UP TO TAKE THE KIDS TO SCHOOL?"**

"HENRY, PLEASE-"

"I HAVE A JOB, AND YOU HAVE A JOB, AND WE CAN'T SPEND THE WEEKEND DRINKING BECAUSE *HER* HUSBAND HAD THE RIGHT IDEA TO LEAVE HER YEARS BEFORE SHE COULD BECOME A RATCHETY OLD BITCH"

"YOU'RE MAKING A SCENE"

"AND SO WAS *YOUR MOTHER* WHEN SHE FELT UP *MY BROTHER* IN FRONT OF THE WHOLE FAMILY AT CHRISTMAS DINNER"

"YOU'RE MAKING THE CHILDREN CRY"

And they were. The two little tins cans were making little Dalek screams.

"Y-Y'know, we don't have to c-charge you." The man took some balls from behind the counter and dropped them onto the counter with his shaky hands.

"GOOD." The father Dalek motioned forward, and the sucker arm vacuumed the ball into its grip, and shot it out like a nerf gun. The ball missed its target but did smash the glass window behind it.

"O-Oh w-well, you can keep trying, of course. N-no extra charge if you pass your limit."

The father dalek sucked up ball after ball, shooting it out of its arm and smashing a window every time. It even went through the skull of a passerby, who happened to be behind one section of glass when it smashed into a million pieces. Eventually it got bored and zapped the target with its laser gun, and the dwarf got dunked.

"LET'S GO." The four wheeled off, crushing more bits of broken glass that were on the ground, which pulverised into dust under the pressure of their heavy frames. The attendants were shitting themselves.

Part 3: Attendance

"Rachel, we've got a man for you to meet" Mr. Gore motioned to this man in a dress suit who was awkwardly smiling at her. Sitting one leg on the manager's desk and the other foot on his chair, he pulled back his hair as it reset and bounced forward like a discount jewfro. The gap in his teeth was left so out in the open you could shine a light through it, and his darker-than-you-see-in-the-movies shade of skin was reminiscent of an overrated British comedian.

Rachel was processing the moment. "Who's this?" she asked, expecting her manager to answer. "Ah yes, you must be Rayshell." The man took her hand into both of his and shook it vigorously, adding "I understand you've been witness to some strange sights at the park, yes?"

"Yes," Rachel answered "these four tin things have been causing trouble, I don't know what they are."

"Ah, well that's just brilliant, follow me." he put his hand on her shoulder and started walking her out. "You see, I'm from a parallel universe where I fight these guys on a regular basis. Not these things specifically, but their species you see, they're an alien thing with their thingy things and I've been here trying to stop them from causing things in this thing."

"Is that Buffy speak? I hate Buffy speak."

"Quite right. Well, in this parallel universe I'm trying to liberate this city called Dalektropolis. Horrendous place, I rate it zero stars out of five, but anyway. During a typical rebel raid a family of them malfunctioned in battle and got think that they were humans, and you know the kind of trouble they were causing when they thought that. So now I've got, with a little help from you dear, to get them back in their universe before they do something **really** bad like preventing the Lincoln assassination. Any questions?"

"Fuck off."

"Good, now let's go."

Part 4: Anticlimax

Rachel and the Tuxedo man were hot on the trail of the Dalek family. They were last seen trying to purchase cotton candy and use their plunger arms as the stick to swirl it around in. The lead was easy. They followed the trail of corn syrup that the tank's bottoms trundled in.

Whilst on the journey the man dubbed the group 'the faux-leks.' "A simple name, but a nice ring to it," he added, which is an opinion he concurred only with himself. Rachel was getting too old for this, she was 19.

The Daleks were found, this time attempting to play DDR in an arcade. They were actually really good, but the man had to put a stop to their disco fever.

"Quel dommage, Daleks." The family's game was interrupted.

"YOU! YOU OPPRESSED US."

"Funny thing, the Daleks, they're always trying to deceive you. That's how you know it's them." He assured to Rachel, and took out a black cylinder. He fiddled with the three different settings, and used the little grey switch to turn it to full max. The Daleks approached. It shook and hopped in his hand violently, finally ejaculating a blue energy and opening a portal behind the Daleks.

The family begged for mercy as they were sucked back into their native universe, but as a last act of defiance they shot a bolt straight into the man's chest. The impact loosened his bow tie, which is the most important loss to take note of.

The final faux-lek was returned to its home, and the mystery stranger lay in agony on the floor. Rachel sat there consoling him, but she really couldn't give a monkey's. A bronze, gold, white rainbow-like light glowed on his body. His skin began to burn and morph as he grinned like a madman.

Rachel stood back, and averted her eyes from the bright display. When it dissipated, this man she didn't know was a new man she didn't know. His hair was unkempt, he was no longer clean shaven and most notably: he was white.

"What the hell just happened?"

"Brilliant. Absolutely brilliant. Best regeneration I've ever had, well the only one I've ever had, but still an exciting precedent to set for future regeneration to one up. Or maybe every other regeneration will even better, in which case that's even more exciting!"

"Are you, *okay*?" She went to put her hand on him-

The man grabbed Rachel's neck and snapped it like a twig. Her body flopped back down when released. He let out a maniacal laugh, which slowly trailed off into kind of a gay one.

The residents of the arcade kept their silence. They stared at this monster as he rose to his feet, and he kind of stumbled which made it more awkward, but one of them then broke the spell: "What are you?", a fat middle-aged gamer asked.

"It seems I haven't properly introduced myself," he said, fixing his crumpled suit jacket "you forget sometimes." An Irish accent started to emerge in his voice, as this fellow began to fasten his bowtie. "I'm the Doctor. Dr. Epoch Smith."

The Epoch Doctor

by Gallifrey Immigrant

What if Chris O'Dowd's 'Epoch Doctor' had an adventure of his own?

The Epoch Doctor swept into the scene. He punched out three Ogrons, as the Dark Rassilon began the incantations of Arluxia.

“HHHOMMMIUM EL SATRE ETTE NUSSUM”

cried the disciples. It was an ancient dialect, spoken when the world was young. Dark Rassilon turned (he was like the Valeyard, except Rassilon's Valeyard) and said “You know not what the anti-time can do, The Epoch Doctor. It is dank mangic, of the unholy sort.”

“Class is unattainable, though perhaps, it is not so much class that is unattainable, but rather the fatal flaw, and some would say the paradigm, of class,” said The Epoch Doctor smugly. His dark eyes blistered into Dark Rassilon's as Dark Rassilon threw his finger into the air, and the Tower of Babel started to sing.

The disciples crowed louder in the ancient dialect:

“LES LAPINS ENNEIGEEÉS MANGENT LE GÂTEAU”

“Do you know how long I have been planning this?” cried Dark Rassilon.

“The subject is interpolated into a Debordist image that includes narrativity as a paradox!” screamed The Epoch Doctor.

“No? No, not paradox. Ascension!” whispered Dark Rassilon.

The energy of the trapped Time Lords within the tower began to merge. A creature began to emerge from the top of the building. It was a being from beyond the edge of time, not quite as far away from the edge as say, the Fendahl, but definitely farther than Fenric. It was...a dark copy of The Epoch Doctor.

The Dark Epoch had begun.

The Epoch Doctor brushed his beard, and said “Must we choose between dialectic situationism and conceptual discourse?”

The disciples had grown louder now, screaming to the high heavens in that ancient, but treasured dialect:

“冰雪覆盖的兔子吃蛋糕!”

Dark Epoch landed down to the ground, and blasted The Epoch Doctor with temporal lightning. The Epoch Doctor regenerated...into an identical The Epoch Doctor, called 2nd Epoch. (He was different in one way, though—he was ginger.)

“How dare you use subconceptual dialectic theory to attack outdated perceptions of sexual identity?” said 2nd Epoch.

Suddenly, a red double-decker bus crashed through the Tower of Babel. Dark Rassilon blinked in confusion, as the masterpiece that he had been working on for millenias untold was destroyed in a few seconds.

“Wait, what?” said the disciples.

The bus landed softly on the ground, and a middle-aged woman walked out, a walking Panda holding her gin very nicely.

“I win!” announced Iris Wildthyme.

“Wait, she’s cheating!” said the 2nd Epoch.

Fitz slammed the piece down on the ground. “She’s cheating. She can’t just bring herself into this game, as herself!”

“Now, hold on. There’s no actual rule against it,” said Iris.

Justine (formerly Cousin Justine) flipped through the rulebook of “Roleplaying For Denizens of the City of the Saved, Version XXXII”, and announced “It is against the rules. “A Citizen cannot play as themselves.”

(Fun fact: The City of the Saved is the place where all humans are resurrected after they die.)

“But I’m not a Citizen. I snuck into the City,” said Iris.

“Isn’t that supposed to be impossible?” asked Fitz.

Iris shrugged. Then she poked Fitz, saying “What sort of name is the Epic Doctor?”

“The *Epoch* Doctor. He’s the ultimate form of the Doctor, after years and years of pain.”

“He sounded like a lousy Postmodernism 101 student,” said Iris.

“That’s because he understands beyond time and--”

“Hey, everyone,” said Oswin. She was the newest addition to the group, alongside some guy called Mickey.

“You’ve read the rules?” asked Justine. Oswin nodded.

“Can I play myself?” asked Mickey.

“No.”

“Can I play the Doctor?” asked Mickey.

Justine sighed. “As DM, I’m now saying ‘No’ to that as well. Other Homeworlders are allowed, though.”

Mickey rolled his eyes, and said “Can I play the tin dog?”

“K9? Surely,” said Justine. “I’ve always found the dog an admirable weapon of war.”

“Yeah? I’m often compared to K9,” said Mickey, smiling smugly.

"I'll play, um, a Celestis. Those sound cool," said Oswin, flipping through the character classes. "Are those a weak class?"

"They're a little insubstantial, but has advantages," said Justine.

"I'll play Peri. She looks nice," said Fitz.

"I'll play Cousin Justine," said Iris.

Justine slowly turned her head to stare at her, and raised an eyebrow.

"It's allowed in the rules, right? Plus, infinite weapons," said Iris.

"Alright. But I'm going to make you suffer for that, you know. There will be no extra niceties here," said Justine.

"Fine," said Iris.

"Good," said Justine. "Hmm. K9, a Celestis agent, myself, and Peri Brown. I Know!"

She started. "Alright. There's this book, called The Book Of The Enemy..."

A Prelude To Arms

by Nate Bumbernickel

What if Nate, an official published Faction Paradox author in his own right, returned to Shit Trips to provide a Faction Paradox story of his own?

“The body’s on its way?”

“Yup.”

“When will it be here?”

“About fifteen minutes.”

He looked at his partner. This was only her third week on the job, and she was already bored. He’d seen this happen with too many new recruits: they’d come in without the patience needed, then they’d burn out, and then someone new would arrive and the cycle would begin again. Of course, the blame was equally his. He hated small talk. “We can’t speed it up?”

“With today’s energy allowance?” She sighed. “Not enough to matter.”

“Ahh.” After thinking for a moment, he added, “I’ve been working on writing a book.”

That got her attention. “A story?”

“A *history*.”

She leaned forward. “About the War!”

He scoffed. “There’s already too much out there about that. Primers for the Spiral Politic, Books of the Peace ...”

“Well it’s not like we just came out of the most interesting and –”

“I’m aiming for something more recent. A little-known event from the Emperor’s early years. I have it all planned out,” he said. “Part One is all background stuff: entropy predictions, the great energy crisis, yada yada yada. But then Part Two is about when the Emperor travelled backwards along his timeline into the War.”

Her eyebrows raised. “Is that even possible?”

“That’s the thing – no one knows about it! It’s all been swept under the rug. But you can get the full story if you know the right people back on the Needle.” He felt himself getting excited. Was she interested? “See, he got the ruling Houses to pull his past self out of time and put him on trial.”

“Why would he do that?”

“You know about their self-healing abilities?”

“Of course I do!” She looked genuinely offended. “Just because I’m new doesn’t mean I don’t know anything.”

“Sorry, sorry. Well it runs on a special kind of energy, energy that can be used to power the Needle for years. The Emperor already gave up all of his, so he tried to steal more from an earlier version of himself! According to Chrystine Winkle, not only would that give us centuries of extra energy, it’d also creates a paradox so he can harvest energy from the time differential.”

“Wait wait wait,” she said. “Chrys Winkle? I’ve heard that some of her stuff –”

“I know her reputation, but the evidence is really solid. Just look at this.” He typed on the time-space visualiser, then rapped on the screen. “The planet Ravolox. Appeared out of nowhere in the middle of space, then disappeared just as fast.”

“So? That seems normal for the War.”

“But the dates for its appearance match perfectly to the predictions about when the trial was happening!”

“... yeah, okay.” She looked unconvinced. “So did it work?”

“Nope. My theory is that he was sabotaged by the Inquisitor, who I think was an incarnation of Lolita. But no one knows for sure.” He shrugged. “The real point is to show how the Emperor is so loyal to his subjects that he was even willing to perform the ultimate self-sacrifice.”

This raised her eyebrows. “You’re a fan of the Emperor?”

“Of course,” he said. “Aren’t you?”

She hrmphed, withdrawing into her seat. “I don’t talk about politics at work.”

Ahh, okay. He was more than fine with not talking. He swiped Ravolox off the screen, revealing the floating corpse beginning its final approach.

“So then what’s Part Three?” she asked.

He hadn’t expected that. “I ... I haven’t planned a Part Three.”

“Oh come on,” she said. “There needs to be a Part Three. Maybe something about the aftermath?”

“There wasn’t really much of an aftermath,” he said apologetically. “The attempt failed, the Emperor came back, and the whole thing was covered up.”

“Then write about the coverup! The journey you took to discover it all. You could even include this conversation!” She looked at him happily. “I’ve always wanted to be in a book.”

“I suppose I could work it in as an introduction,” he sighed. “Or maybe a bonus deleted scene published somewhere obscure.”

“Not too obscure, I hope,” she said. “I’ll want to be able to show my friends.”

The computer dinged. “The body’s here,” he said, priming the visualiser for another run. “Let’s see what this one’s story is.”

“We can do that?” she asked, leaning forward with renewed interest.

“Of course!” he said. “What could go wrong?”

Framing Story: Part 11

TV, AUDIO, COMIC, PROSE

by Neo

“Jack, one of those tapes mentioned Tosh.”

“We’re not gonna talk about that tape,” said Jack, his American accent stronger than ever. “In fact, we’re not gonna talk about that tape at all!”

“Okay, okay,” said Gwen. She was fiddling with a tape she’d idly picked from a shelf. “Hey Jack, look at the title - They of the Doctor.”

“Is that the whole title?” Jack asked, coming over to look.

Gwen peered at it. She was missing something. She’d been missing something the whole time. It gnawed away at her.

“Wait,” she said. “Look - AUDIO: They of the Doctor. I’d just skimmed over that part, I suppose.”

“What do you think that means?”

“What, audio? I don’t know, it looks like a VHS to me but maybe there’s no video. Guess we won’t exactly be watching this one then, eh?”

Jack didn’t say anything.

“Kind of a stupid idea, isn’t it?” she continued.

He looked at her, seeming like he was waiting for her to say more. She didn’t. She was tired of being treated like this. She put the tape into the player, and started to listen.

They of the Doctor

by Neo

What if the fiftieth anniversary had featured three alternate Doctors - a Paterson Joseph Doctor, the Meta-Crisis Tenth Doctor, and a David Bowie Doctor?

The three Doctors were trapped in the dungeon below the Tower of London. They were struggling to come up with a plan for how to get out.

"Tonight should be a free-fire idea zone," said the bald Doctor.

The Doctor with the mismatched eyes looked over pointedly at the door, and waved his microphone-esque sonic screwdriver at it. He'd already annoyed the other Doctors by the way he'd project instrumental backing music out of it when he sang.

"I know when to go out, when to stay in," he sang, "get things done."

The handsome half-Doctor shook his head.

"We'd have to calculate the exact harmonic resonance of the entire structure down to a sub-atomic level," he said.

"Don't be alarmed," said the bald Doctor. "Take a seat and I'll just power through. Should take forty-five minutes; I'm done in ten. Stick that up your dojo."

"Even the sonic would take years," replied the half-Doctor dismissively. The bald Doctor shut up upon hearing that, looking down at his feet with nothing to say.

"Pale blinds drawn all day," sang the musical Doctor, looking pointedly at the bald Doctor. "Nothing to do, nothing to say."

"It must be really recent for you," said the half-Doctor, seething at the musical Doctor's indifference to their situation. "The Time War. The last day. The day you killed them all."

"Passionate bright young things takes him away to war," he sang in reply. The half-Doctor snarled, to which he further responded, "battles cries and champagne just in time for sunrise."

The half-Doctor tackled the musical Doctor.

"I'd just like to assure everyone that he will indeed be dead within a month," said the bald Doctor, assuring the half-Doctor he was wasting his time.

The musical Doctor laughed at that portent of his death.

"You promised me the ending would be clear," he sang, "you'd let me know when the time was now. Don't let me know when you're opening the door, strap me in the dark, let me disappear."

"What? What?" asked the half-Doctor.

"Look up here," elaborated the musical Doctor, "I'm in heaven. I've got scars that can't be seen, I've got drama can't be stolen. Everybody knows me now."

"Are you a pathetic, worthless punk" the bald Doctor asked the musical Doctor, as fed up with his antics now as the half-Doctor was.

"I'm deranged," he wailed in reply.

"Then I'm going to make you feel like you're a turkey fucker," he said, approaching him menacingly. "Why? Because I'm the big man and you're a shitheel, right?"

The half-Doctor nodded at the bald Doctor as he raised his fists.

"We'd both end up winners. Isn't that right?" he asked the half-Doctor, but it was the musical Doctor who responded, with more laughter.

"Is something funny?" asked the half-Doctor. "Did I miss a funny thing?"

"Time takes a cigarette, puts it in your mouth," the musical Doctor sang.

The half-doctor took his meaning. They were all the same man, yet they were threatening each other with violence. It was absurd.

"Sorry?" said the bald Doctor.

"Oh no, not me," replied the musical Doctor.

Clara then burst through the door which had been very much unlocked the entire time, and they were all caught up in the adventure together until they all joined the musical Doctor on the barn they'd used to live in on Gallifrey, the Moment and the big red button representing destruction of the Time Lords and Daleks waiting for them.

"Hey, I'm just a Doctor," said the bald Doctor. The half-Doctor took his meaning...this was in their past, this wasn't something they wanted to do again. The musical Doctor wasn't a Doctor like them, he was the one who broke the promise.

"And you," the musical Doctor sang to him, "you can be mean."

A projection of wartorn Gallifrey surrounded them, showing the musical Doctor shooting “no more” into a wall.

“I, I can remember,” he sang, “standing by the wall, and the guns shot above our heads. We’re nothing, and nothing will help us, maybe we’re lying, then you better not stay. But we could be safer, just for one day. Just for one day.”

“Okay, sure, fine, if it’ll make you feel any better,” said the bald Doctor, placing his hand atop the musical Doctor’s, resting on the Moment, the button to end it all.

“I’m not a prophet or a stone-aged man, just a mortal with potential of a superman, I’m living on,” sang the musical Doctor again.

A mortal with the potential of a superman...the penny dropped for the half-Doctor on why they’d been brought here together.

“One question,” said the bald Doctor, the idea coming to his mind as well, “what do you actually see?”

“You’re not actually suggesting that we change our own personal history?”

“Though nothing will drive them away, we can beat them, just for one day,” he sang in response, and kept singing, as they saved Gallifrey together. “We can be heroes, just for one day.”

Framing Story: Part 12

Stories for Years

by Neo

Gwen's mind was reeling.

"Jack, that wasn't audio."

"I know."

"Was it meant to be?"

"I think so. It'd have worked better as audio."

"It wasn't video either. Oh god, none of them were, were they?"

"None of them were."

"They were just...words. Words on a screen. Why are we watching words on a screen?"

"I'm not sure, but I think there's a way to find out. Look, I've got...where is it? It was just here," Jack said, scrambling around.

"Lost a tape?"

"It was right here...something's up with this room. It must have returned to one of the shelves somehow. I'm going to have to search every tape in here, but I think I know the way out of here when I find the tape I'm looking for."

"Nothing's going to unlock, is it? Not a door for our friends. Not a door for us."

"I don't think it matters either way. Look, I'll search for the tape we need. Why don't you put in another tape while I look? Make it a long one."

"No, I'll help, we'll go twice as fast if I look with you."

"And if it doesn't work, then we'll have wasted however long it'd take anyway. You keep to the tapes, in case it helps."

"Fine," she said, getting up and looking around for the longest tape she could find. She eventually found a very bulky case. She read its title carefully - AUDIO: Follow the

River, and You Will Reach the Sea. She turned the case over and saw the same title, but beginning with VIDEO instead.

Except, she knew it wasn't really audio or video. Just words.

She pushed it into the player, and read the words as they began to fill her vision.

Follow the River, and You Will Reach the Sea

by Neo

What if we saw all of River Song's lives from her perspective?

Author's Note: This story contains direct extracts from episodes River appeared in, as well as the novelisation of 'The Day of the Doctor'. Sections without any such extracts have headings that aren't the names of episodes.

I believe viewing River's scenes from the order she experienced them in, with original linking material to map her character development across them, provides a rather interesting perspective. This story is not purely a rearrangement of transcripts of her scenes however, as fascinating as that could still be. Many intermittent sections, as well as the entire ending, veer from what we were given on television. I tell you this instead of just letting the story speak for itself because I'm aware of the length commitment of the story.

Many, many thanks to the rest of the community for the many conversations that brainstormed how to creatively make this perspective work.

A GOOD MAN GOES TO WAR

Melody Pond had only a few hours of life to her name, and would never remember the first words her mother spoke to her on Demon's Run. Still, she heard them all the same.

"I wish I could tell you that you'll be loved, that you'll be safe, and cared for, and protected. But this isn't a time for lies. What you are going to be, Melody, is very, very brave."

"Two minutes."

"But not as brave as they'll have to be. Because there's someone coming. I don't know where he is, or what he's doing, but trust me, he's on his way. There's a man who's never going to let us down, and not even an army can get in the way."

A different woman moved towards Melody.

"Leave her. Just you leave her. Please leave her! Please, leave her!"

Melody's mother lent over her crib.

“He’s the last of his kind. He looks young, but he’s lived for hundreds and hundreds of years. And wherever they take, Melody, however scared you are, I promise you, you will never be alone. Because this man is your father. He has a name, but the people of our world know him better as the Last Centurion.”

Melody smiled.

She stopped smiling after the other woman took her away, but started smiling again when a man she instantly and intuitively recognised as her father had found her, rescued her.

Banging. Melody understood little, but she heard much. It would be many, many years before she understood just what having a “timehead” meant. For now, it meant she took in events while lacking the age and language to make her feelings of them known to others.

Right now, her feeling was irritation, as her father banged over and over again on a door. She could tell he was trying to bring Melody to her mother - or, in Melody’s rudimentary language of her own, big-milk-thing.

“Who’s that? Who’s there? You watch it, because I’m armed and really dangerous, and cross.”

“Yeah, like I don’t know that.”

“Rory? Rory, is that you?”

“Yeah, it’s me. Look, hang on a minute.”

Melody heard a strange melodic buzzing. It came from the other man, next to her father. Melody felt an odd sense of kinship with him as well.

“They took her. Rory, they took our baby away.”

Her father opened the door.

“Now, Mrs. Williams, that is never, ever going to happen.”

“Oh my god, oh my god, where’s she been? What have they done to her?”

“She’s fine. Amy, she’s fine. I checked. She’s beautiful. Oh god,” he said through tears, “I was going to be cool. I wanted to be cool. Look at me.”

“You’re okay. Crying Roman with a baby. Definitely cool. Come here you.”

“Ughr, kissing and crying,” interjected that other man as her parents began kissing and crying, “I’ll, I’ll be back in a bit.”

“Oi,” said her father, “you, get in here, now. My daughter - what do you think?”

“Hello. Hello baby,” he said to her.

“Melody,” corrected her mother.

“Melody? Hello Melody Pond.

“Melody Williams-”

“...is a geography teacher. Melody Pond is a superhero.”

“Well, yes, I suppose she does smell nice,” said the man to Melody. “Never really sniffed her. Maybe I should give it a go. Amelia Pond, come here.”

“Doctor.”

“I’m sorry we were so long.”

“It’s okay. I knew you were coming. Both of you. My boys.”

Melody addressed the Doctor with a few thoughts of her own.

“It’s okay, she’s still all yours,” he replied, “and really, you should call her mummy, not big-milk-thing.”

“Okay, what are you doing?”

“I speak Baby.”

“No, you don’t.”

“I speak everything, don’t I Melody Pond?”

Melody made her thoughts on the Doctor’s fashion sense known.

“No, it’s not. It’s cool.”

“Doctor,” said a green woman entering the room, “take a look. They’re leaving. Demon’s Run is ours without a drop of blood spilled. My friend, you have never risen higher.”

Events proceeded that Melody lacked the capability to understand. For her, they ended in beginning to dissolve into in a pile of milky white goo in her father’s arms. For a being as young as her, time ran much slower than it did for the adults that fought around her.

Being liquefied felt like it took an eternity, not a second. What little memories she had of her life jolted through her head. A blinding light flashed.

KILL THE DOCTOR

The real, non-duplicate Melody Pond awoke far, far away from where her decoy self had melted, to a life far, far different than what her parents had envisioned for her.

Silence. Chime. The training. Pampered.

Silence. Grime. Graystark. Scampered.

Silence. Time. Her memories. Tampered.

“Kill the Doctor.”

Her first words.

“Kill the Doctor.”

She didn’t know how old she was. All she knew was that she had to-

“Kill the Doctor.”

Guilty people deserved to be punished. To die. The Furies, that’s how Madame Kovarian explained it. Those who lied. Acted falsely. It was her job to-

“Kill the Doctor.”

Endless days in the Nightmare Room. Demon’s Run. Then endless days in Greystark Hall. Earth.

There was so much she couldn’t remember. The monsters, they made her forget. But the spaceman trying to eat her, she remembered that. Swallow her up. It would call whoever it thought would help her, though she didn’t understand what exactly that meant - help her? Help her kill the Doctor? Help her escape? She tried to warn who it called about the monsters too, but he didn’t listen.

PREQUEL TO THE IMPOSSIBLE ASTRONAUT

“Hello? Hello, this is the President. Hello, this is the President of the United States. Who is this? Is it you again?”

“Look behind you.”

“How did you get this number? This is my private line. How did you get through?”

“They’re everywhere. All the time. You see them every day. But you have to look behind you.”

“There is nothing behind me. How did you get this number?”

“The spaceman told me.”

“What spaceman?”

“It doesn’t matter. I’m telling you about the monsters. Please, you must look behind you.”

“Young lady, there are no monsters in the Oval Office.”

THE IMPOSSIBLE ASTRONAUT

“Hello? Who is this? This is President Nixon. Who’s calling? Is this you again?”

“Mr. President?”

“This is the President, yes.”

“I’m scared, Mr. President. I’m scared of the spaceman.”

“What spaceman? Where are you phoning from? Where are you right now? Who are you?”

“Jefferson Adams Hamilton.”

“Jefferson, listen to me.”

“Hello. This is President Nixon.”

“It’s here! The spaceman’s here! It’s going to get me! It’s going to eat me! Mr. President, please help. Please help me!”

“Jefferson, it’s alright. I’m sending my best people.”

“Help me! Help! Help me!”

The spaceman had swallowed her.

“Help me! Please!”

No control. She had no control. She was moving, but none of it was her. The spaceman had ate her up and she powerless against it.

“Help! Help me! Help me!”

The spaceman entered the room. She entered the room. The spaceman rose an arm. She rose an arm.

There they were. There he was.

“Help me!”

“Get down!”

“What are you doing?”

“Saving your life!”

“No!”

The bullet hit the spaceman.

DAY OF THE MOON

Greystark Hall. Months later.

“Who are you? I don’t understand, so just tell me who you are.”

The spaceman raised an arm. She raised an arm. The spaceman opened the visor. She opened the visor.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to shoot you. I’m glad I missed. But you killed the Doctor. Or you’re going to kill him. But who are you? Just please tell me, because I don’t understand.”

“Please help me. Help me. Please.”

Two of the monsters entered the room.

She’d escaped the spaceman. Everyone else was busy with the monsters.

She ran. How she ran. So far. She was always so hungry. So sick. When she finally made it to New York she felt worse than ever before, but that was okay. She knew what happened next.

Her, but new. Her, but again. Another chance. She could move on. Be a new person. She didn't have to be the tortured little girl anymore. That could be someone else.

She was ready.

Her coughing drew the attention of a man rustling through the rubbish lining the alley.

"Are you okay?" he asked. "Little girl, are you okay?"

"It's alright. It's quite all right. I'm dying. But I can fix that. It's easy, really. See?"

Her skin was glowing and gold. She giggled as she looked at her hands light aflame. She surrendered to her ending. Energy ran through her. Memories of the life she'd lived ran through her head. A blinding light flashed.

LET'S KILL HITLER

Mels had trouble remembering some things - how she'd gotten from 1969 New York to 1996 Leadworth for one - but her head was a hell of a lot clearer than her last self's had been.

She tried not dwell on things, and always look ever forward. Dwelling on things made her head spin. Like, how had she ended up in Leadworth?

She'd tried to track down Amy and Rory for two years, right? As a toddler...in New York...? That made sense, didn't it? She was resourceful, a survivor, she'd made it work.

She's regenerated in 1969 though. It was 1996 now. Well, she could hold off ageing couldn't she? It was like Madame Kovarian said, part Time Lord, special powers and all that.

But what did she do for twenty-seven years? Well, she'd...gone around different orphanages, travelled around, picked up more skills and knowledge and whatnot. Hadn't she? She'd enjoyed training herself instead of being trained by others, wasn't that right?

She hadn't lived with her parents already, somehow in their sixties in Manhattan, had she? They hadn't enjoyed many peaceful years together, before their natural deaths had seen Mels off to seek their much younger selves in 1996 Leadworth, right?

Madame Kovarian hadn't come for her again, she knew that much. Mels was strong, Mels was wily, Mels was in control. Madame Kovarian hadn't tampered with her memories, she hadn't dropped her off in 1996 Leadworth, she hadn't encouraged her to

befriend her parents for her own ends. Mels had found her parents by herself and for her own reasons, to know them, be raised by them, one way or another. It wasn't part of killing the Doctor. She hadn't seen Madame Kovarian for years. She was in control.

But when she dwelt on things, well...it didn't feel like it. So she didn't.

Onwards. Always.

"Is he hot?"

"No, he's funny."

"But how can he travel in time?"

"Because he's got a time machine, stupid."

A blindfolded Rory burst into the room, interrupting Mels and Amelia.

"I thought we were playing hide and seek. I've been hiding for hours."

"Well, we just haven't found you yet."

"Okay. Hi Mels."

"Hi Rory."

"Mels, did you not understand the question? I'm asking you why the Titanic sank."

"Because the Doctor didn't save it. Except you don't know about the Doctor, because you're stupid."

"Why are you always in trouble? You're the most in trouble in the whole school, except for boys."

"And you."

"I count as a boy."

Mels and Amelia walked past a blindfolded Rory ambling around the schoolyard.

"Am I getting warm?" he asked.

"Yes Rory."

"Mels?"

"A significant factor in Hitler's rise to power was the fact that the Doctor didn't stop him."

"I was late. I took a bus."

"Er, you stole a bus."

"Who steals a bus?"

"I returned it."

"You drove it through the Botanical Garden."

"Shortcut."

"Why can't you just act like a person? Like a normal, legal person?"

"I don't know - maybe I need a doctor."

"Stop it."

"Er, I better go. I'm on earlies tomorrow."

"Okay."

"It's alright for you, you've got Mr. Perfect keeping you right."

"He's not even real. Just a stupid dream when I was a kid."

"No, I wasn't talking about him."

"What, Rory? How have I 'got' Rory?"

"Yeah how, how's she got me?"

"He's not mine."

"No. No, I'm not hers."

"Oh, come on. Seriously, it's got to be you two. Oh, cut to the song, it's getting boring."

“Nice thought, okay, but completely impossible.”

“Yeah, impossible.”

“I mean, I’d love to. He’s gorgeous. He’s my favourite guy. But he’s, you know...”

“A friend.”

“Gay.”

“I’m not gay.”

“Yes, you are.”

“No. No, I’m not.”

“Course you are. Don’t be stupid. In the whole time I’ve known you, when have you shown any interest in a girl?”

“Penny in the air...”

“I mean, I’ve known you for, what, ten years? I’ve seen you practically every day. Name one girl you’ve paid the slightest bit of attention to...oh my god. Rory!”

“...and the penny drops.”

“Rory!”

Mels tossed Amy’s stuffed TARDIS back onto her bed.

“Catch you later, Time Boy.”

Mels hit the brakes on the Chevrolet Corvette, brought it to a halt, and jumped out to greet her unwitting parents, and the one accompanying them.

“You said he was funny,” she said, looking up and down at the Doctor. “You never said he was hot.”

“Mels!”

“What are you doing here?”

“Following you. What do you think?”

“Where did you get the car?”

"It's mine," said Mels. Police sirens wailed in the distance. "...ish."

"Oh Mels, not again."

"You can't keep doing this. You're going to end in prison."

"Sorry, hello," said the Doctor, joining the conversation. "Doctor not following this. Doctor very lost. You never said I was hot?"

"Is that the phone box? The bigger-on-the-inside phone box? Oh, time travel. That's just brilliant, Yeah, I've heard a lot about you. I'm their best mate."

"Then why don't I know you? I danced with everyone at the wedding. The women were all brilliant. The men were a bit shy."

"I don't do weddings."

The sirens were getting louder. Closer.

"And that's me out of time."

Mel pulled out her gun and levelled it at the Doctor.

"Mels!"

"For god's sake!"

"I need out of here, now," she said.

"Anywhere in particular?" asked the Doctor.

"Well, let's see. You've got a time machine, I've got a gun, what the hell - let's kill Hitler."

"You've shot it! You shot my TARDIS! You shot the console!"

"It's your fault!"

"How's it my fault?"

"You said guns didn't work in this place. You said we're in a state of temporal grace."

"That was a clever lie you idiot! Anyone could tell that was a clever lie."

Mels, Amy, Rory, and the Doctor scrambled around the TARDIS as it crashed into the Reich Chancellery.

In 1938.

“Out, out, out, everybody out! Don’t breathe the smoke, just get out!”

“Where are we?”

“A room.”

“What room?”

“I don’t know what room. I haven’t memorised every room in the universe yet. I had yesterday off. Mels, don’t go in there.”

He took her gun away from her.

“Oi.”

“Bad smoke. Don’t breathe the bad, bad smoke. Bad, deadly smoke, because somebody shot my TARDIS!”

After they all exited the TARDIS, Rory tried to assist a fallen man on the ground. It wasn’t long before Hitler made his presence known. The fallen man rose and made for Hitler, but Hitler fired shot after shot at him. One of those shots missed, and hits Mels instead.

“Mels?”

“Hitler.”

“What about him?”

“Lousy shot.”

She collapsed, clutching her side.

“Mels! Mels!”

“Rory!”

“No, no, no, no! I’ve got to stop the bleeding.”

“How bad is it? Rory, what can we do?”

“Just keep her conscious. Stay with us, Mels.”

“Hey,” the Doctor said to her, “look at me. Just hold on.”

"I used to dream about you," she told him. "All those stories Amy used to tell me."

"What stories? Tell me what stories. Vampires in Venice, that's a belter."

"When I was little, I was going to marry you."

"Good idea, let's get married. You stay alive and I'll marry you, deal? Deal?"

"Shouldn't you ask my parent's permission?"

"As soon as you're well, I'll get on the phone."

"Might as well do it now, since they're both right here. Penny in the air...penny drops."

Her hands began to glow with golden light for the second time in her lives.

"What the hell's going on?"

"Back, back, back! Get back!"

"Last time I did this, I ended up a toddler in the middle of New York."

"Okay Doctor, explain what is happening please."

"Mels. Short for..."

"Melody."

"Yeah, I named my daughter after her."

"You named your daughter...after your daughter."

"It took me years to find you two. I'm so glad I did. And you see? It all worked out in the end, didn't it. You got to raise me after all."

"You're Melody?"

"But if she's Melody, that means she's also..."

"Shut up, dad, I'm focusing on a dress size."

Bathed in golden light. Another life down. She liked being Mels. She liked this life. But it was time. Onwards. Always.

She surrendered to the energy running through her. Memories of her two lives jolted through her head. A blinding light flashed.

“Oh! Oh! Oh! Whoa! Right, let’s see then. Oh, it’s all going on down there, isn’t it? The hair! Oh, the hair! It just doesn’t stop, does it? Look at that. Everything changes. Oh, but I love it. I love it! I’m all sort of mature. Hello Benjamin.”

“Who’s Benjamin?”

“The teeth. The teeth, the teeth! Oh, look at them!”

She advanced toward the Doctor, and pinned him against Hitler’s desk.

“Watch out that bowtie. Excuse me, you lot. I need to weigh myself.”

She inspected herself with delight for a time, before coming back to the room with her parents and the Doctor.

“I’m going to wear lots of jodhpurs. Well, now, enough of all that. Down to business.”

She brandished Hitler’s gun. Kill the Doctor. That’s what she was about. But, wasn’t she smitten with the Doctor? Hadn’t she spent years and years obsessed with him, crushing on him, wanting to run away with him?

No, she was born to kill the Doctor. That’s what she was about. She was in control, her mind was fine, and she was going to kill the Doctor. Don’t think too hard, don’t dwell, she’d learnt that from someone.

“Oh, hello. I thought we were getting married.”

“I told you, I’m not a wedding person.”

“Doctor, what’s she doing?”

“What she’s programmed to.”

“Where’d she get the gun?”

“Hello Benjamin.”

He was smart. Oh, how she loved that.

“You noticed.”

She fired the gun at this smart love of hers, but, as anticipated, no bullets.

“Of course I noticed. As soon as I knew you were coming, I tidied up a bit.”

"I know you did."

"I know you know."

She reached for the gun hidden in the fruit bowl, but out came a banana instead.

"Goodness, is killing you going to take all day?"

"Why, are you busy?"

"Oh, I'm not complaining."

"If you were in a hurry, you could've killed me in the cornfield."

"We'd only just met. I'm a psychopath, I'm not rude."

She grabbed the fallen man's gun but, again, no bullets.

"You're not a psychopath, why would she be a psychopath?"

"Oh mummy, mummy, pay attention. I was trained and conditioned for one purpose. I was born to kill the Doctor."

"Demon's Run, remember? This is what they were building. My bespoke psychopath."

"I'm all yours, sweetie."

She kissed him. She killed him.

"Only River Song gets to call me that."

"And who's River Song?"

"An old friend of mine."

"Stupid name. Oh, look at that. Berlin on the eve of war. A whole world about to tear itself apart - now that's my kind of town. Mum, dad, don't follow me. And, yes, that is a warning."

"No warning for me then?"

"No need, my love. The deed is done and so are you."

He staggered.

"Doctor, what's wrong?" asked Amy.

“What have you done? River!”

“Oh, River, River, River. More than a friend, I think.”

“What have you done?”

“It was never going to be a gun for you, Doctor. The man of peace who understands every kind of warfare, except, perhaps, the cruelest. Kiss, kiss.”

She jumped out the broken window, and left the Doctor to die.

Some manner of Nazis and outfit changes later, the woman who had been Mels checked herself out approvingly in the mirror in some high-class (now quite vacated) German establishment. Eventually her mother saw fit to join her despite her specific warnings for her to do no such thing.

“Now dear, I told you not to follow me.”

She was too busy examining her new appearance, which was greatly to her liking, to think much of her mother’s lack of response.

“I might take the age down a little, just gradually, to freak people out.”

“You killed the Doctor.”

“Oh, yes, I know dear. I hope you’re not going to keep on about it. Oh, regeneration. It’s a whole new colouring to work with!”

“You killed the Doctor on the orders of the movement known as the Silence and Academy of the Question. You accept and know this to be true?”

“Quite honestly, I don’t really remember. It was all a bit of a jumble.”

The being masquerading as her mother opened its mouth and shone a bright beam onto her head, knocking her back.

“No, no! Get off me!”

“Sorry,” said a voice, as the being did just that, “did you say you killed the Doctor?”

The Doctor, in a full tuxedo complete with top hat, reclined against the TARDIS.

“You’re dying...and you stopped to change?”

“Oh, you should always waste time when you don't have any. Time is not the boss of you. Rule four-hundred-and-eight. Amelia Pond, judgement death machine. Why am I not surprised? Sonic cane.”

“Are you serious?”

“Never knowingly. Never knowingly be serious. Rule twenty-seven. You might want to write these down. Oh, it's a robot. With four-hundred-and-twenty-three life signs inside. A robot worked by tiny people. Love it. But how do you all get in there, though? Bigger on the inside? No, basic miniaturisation sustained by a compression ratio. Watch what you eat, it'll get you every time. Amy, if you and Rory are okay, signal me.”

His sonic cane lit up.

“Thanking you,” he said before staggering. “I'm so sorry, leg went to sleep, just had a quick left leg power nap, I forgot I had one scheduled. Actually, better sit down, I think I heard the right one yawning.”

She tried to run, but the being that wasn't her mother held her in place with a ray of light again.

“Don't you touch her! Do not harm her in any way!”

“Why would you care,” spoke the being, “she's the women who kills you.”

“I'm not dead.”

“You're dying.

“Well, at least I'm not a time-travelling shape-shifting robot operated by miniaturised cross people, which, I have got to admit, I didn't see coming. What do you want with her?”

“She's Melody Pond. According to records, the woman who kills the Doctor.”

“And I'm the Doctor. So what's it to you?”

“Throughout history, many criminals have gone unpunished in their lifetimes. Time travel has responsibilities.”

“What? You got yourselves time travel, so you decided to punish dead people?”

“We don't kill them. We extract them near the end of their established timelines.”

“And then what?”

“Give them hell.”

She squirmed, still trapped inside the robot’s energy field.

“I’d ask who you think you are,” said the Doctor, “but I think the answer is pretty obvious. So, who do you think I am? ‘The woman who killed the Doctor’, it sounds like you’ve got my biography in there. I’d love a peek.”

“Our records office is sealed to the public. Foreknowledge is dangerous.”

“Yeah, well, I’ll be dead in three minutes. There isn’t much foreknowledge left.”

“Sorry, can’t do that.”

A pause.

“Records available.”

“Question. I’m dying. Who wants me dead?”

“The Silence.”

“What is the Silence? Why is it called that? What does it mean?”

“The Silence is not a species. It is a religious order, or movement. Their core belief is that silence will fall when the question is asked.”

“What question?”

“The first question. The oldest question in the universe, hidden in plain sight.”

“Yes, but what is the question?”

“Unknown.”

“Oh, well fat lot of use that is, you big ginge. Call yourself a Records-”

He was cut off by an exclamation of pain as her poison continued to work its way through his body.

“Kidneys are always the first to quit. I’ve had better, you know.”

She was suddenly wracked with intense, ceaseless pain. The Nightmare Room had nothing on this, this wasn’t training, conditioning, this wasn’t pain with purpose, this was pure torture. She couldn’t hear what the Doctor and the robot were saying anymore, her senses was so totally overloaded with excruciating pain.

But eventually, it came to an end.

“Please,” she could hear the Doctor say, vainly trying to crawl up the steps to his TARDIS, “now we have to save your parents. Don’t run. Now, I know you’re scared, but never run when you’re scared. Rule seven. Please.”

“Doctor, help us! Doctor, please! Doctor, help!” exclaimed the robot with her mother’s voice. The Doctor continued struggling up the stairs, well past the point where the poison should have rendered him immobile.

“Look at you. Yo still care...”

“Doctor, help! Doctor, help us! Please help us!”

“It’s impressive, I’ll give you that...”

The Doctor continued struggling.

“River, please.”

“Again? Who is this River? She’s got to be a woman, am I right?”

“Help me. Save Amy and Rory. Help me.”

“Tell me about her. Go on.”

“Just help me.”

She did.

Her mother and father clutched each other in their arms as she materialised the TARDIS around them.

“Doctor? Doctor, you did it. He did it!”

She stepped from out behind the console.

“I seem to be able to fly her. She showed me how. She taught me. The Doctor says I’m the child of the TARDIS. What does he mean?”

“Where is he?”

She took them to him.

“You can’t die now,” Amy told the Doctor, “I know you don’t die now.”

“Oh, Pond, you’ve got a schedule for everything.”

“But it doesn’t make any sense.”

“Doctor, what can we do? Come on. How can we help you?”

“No, sorry, Rory you can’t. Nobody can. Ponds, listen to me. I need to talk to your daughter.”

Her parents moved away from him, and let her approach.

“Find her. Find River Song, and tell her something from me.”

He told her something. Something she would never forget.

His name.

“Well, I’m sure she knows.”

The Doctor’s eyes closed, and he lay still.

“Who’s River Song?” she asked her parents.

“Are you still working?” her mother asked her robot duplicate. “Because I’m still a relative. Access files on River Song.”

“Records available.”

“Show me her. Show me River Song.”

The robot transformed, into...

Into her.

“What did he say?” her mother asked her. “The Doctor gave you a message for River Song. What was it?”

She willed those golden flames of regeneration into her hands.

“What’s happening? River, what are you doing?”

“Just tell me. The Doctor...is he worth it?”

“Yes. Yes, he is.”

She placed her glowing, golden hands upon his face.

“River, no...what are you doing?”

“Hello sweetie.”

She kissed him, and between them flames of gold flew as she plunged the energy of untold lives inside of him.

River Song woke up feeling a new woman.

“Hey,” said her mother.

“Hey. Where am I?”

“You’re safe now. Apparently, you used all your remaining regenerations in one go. You shouldn’t have done that.”

“Mother, I had to try.”

“I know.”

“He said no one could save him, but he must have known I could.”

“Rule one,” interrupted the Doctor, “the Doctor lies.”

She closed her eyes, sleep overtaking her.

“She just needs to rest,” said a nurse present. “She’ll be absolutely fine.”

“No, she won’t. She will be amazing.”

She was too asleep to notice the TARDIS journal, striking blue against red ribbon, left beside her, as her family left her again.

At the Luna University in 5123, Professor Arthur Candy interviewed a prospective new student.

“So then, tell me. Why do you want to study archaeology?”

“Well,” River replied, “to be perfectly honest Professor...I’m looking for a good man.”

CLOSING TIME

Many adventures later, River Song - now a doctor in her own right - was at the Luna University, compiling and studying eye witness accounts of the last known sighting of the Doctor before his death on the twenty-second of April, 2011, 5:02 PM, at Lake Silencio in Utah.

"Tick tock, goes, the clock, and what now shall we play?" said a voice from the shadows.

"Hello?"

"Tick tock, goes the clock, now summer's gone away," said Madame Kovarian, a woman River had no recollection of between all the tampering that had been done to her mind and the regenerations that had followed. "Such a lovely old song. But is it about him?"

"You know about the Doctor?" River jumped up with excitement.

"So very well. Oh, don't try and remember me. We've been far too thorough with your dear little head."

Two creatures crept up behind River.

"Oh! What are they? What are those things?"

"Your owners."

"My what?"

"So, they made you a Doctor today, did they? Doctor River Song. How clever you are. You understand what this is, don't you?" She gestured towards the date indicated in River's diary.

"According to some accounts, it's the day the Doctor dies."

"By Silencio Lake, on the Plain of Sighs, an Impossible Astronaut will rise from the deep and strike the Time Lord dead."

"It's a story."

"And this is where it begins."

Two soldiers entered the room, carrying a spacesuit.

"You never really escaped us, Melody Pond. We were always coming for you."

"How do you know who I am?"

"I made you what you are. The woman who kills the Doctor."

"No! No! No!"

River began to slip out of consciousness as a syringe was jabbed into her.

"Tick tock, goes the clock, and all the years they fly," sang Kovarian as River vainly fought against the sedative. "Tick tock, and all too soon, your love will surely die."

River woke up underwater. She knew exactly where. Under the lake. Swallowed by the spaceman yet again.

Half-remembered words swirled around in her head.

"Tick tock, goes the clock, he cradled her and rocked her. Tick tock, goes the clock, till River kills the Doctor."

THE WEDDING OF RIVER SONG

The spaceman rose from Lake Silencio. River rose from Lake Silencio. The Doctor walked over to her. Her parents were in the distance, along with another figure, but she had eyes only for the Doctor.

As he came to her, the spaceman raised its visor. She raised her visor.

"Well then. Here we are at last."

"I can't stop it. The suit's in control."

"You're not supposed to. This has to happen."

"Run."

"I did run. Running brought me here."

"I'm trying to fight it, but I can't. It's too strong."

"I know. It's okay. This is where I died. This is a fixed point. This must happen. This always happens. Don't worry. You won't even remember this. Look over there."

"That's me. How can I be there?"

"That's you from the future, serving time for a murder you probably can't remember. My murder."

“Why would you do that? Make me watch?”

“So that you know this is inevitable. And you are forgiven. Always and completely forgiven.”

“Please, my love, please, please just run!”

“I can’t.”

“Time can be rewritten.”

“Don’t you dare. Goodbye, River.”

The Doctor slowly winked, then shut his eyes. The spaceman made to fire its weapon systems. River aimed the weapon systems. The spaceman made to shoot the Doctor five times. River fired five times.

The Doctor opened his eyes.

“Hello sweetie.”

“What have you done?”

“Well, I think I just drained my weapon systems.”

“But this is fixed. This is a fixed point in time.

“Fixed points can be rewritten.”

“No they can’t, of course they can’t, who told you that?”

It was 5:02 PM. The twenty-second of April, 2011.

Then everything happened at once.

“You were right. Just his presence in the building caused the loop to extend by nearly four chronons.”

In the King’s Chamber of the Great Pyramid of Giza, Area 52, River listened to a doctor advise her on the presence of the Doctor.

“Hi honey, I’m home,” he said.

“And what sort of time do you call this?” she replied.

"The death of time," said Madame Kovarian, tied to a chair. River's prisoner. "The end of time. The end of us all. Oh, why couldn't you just die?"

"Did my best, dear. I showed up. You just can't get the psychopaths these days. Love what you've done with the pyramids. How did you score all this?"

"Hallucinogenic lipstick. Works wonders on President Kennedy. And Cleopatra was a real pushover."

"I always thought so."

"She mentioned you."

"What did she say?"

"Put that gun down."

"Did you?"

"Eventually."

"Oh, they're flirting," complained Kovarian. "Do I have to watch this?"

"It was such a basic mistake, wasn't it, Madame Kovarian? Take a child, raise her into a perfect psychopath, introduce her to the Doctor. Who else was I going to fall in love with?"

"It's not funny River. Reality is fatally compromised. Tell me you understand that."

"Dinner?"

"I don't have the time. Nobody has the time, because as long as I'm alive, time is dying. Because of you, River."

"Because I refused to kill the man I love."

"Oh, you love me, do you? Oh, that's sweet of you, isn't that sweet? Come here, you."

"Get him!"

Her soldiers grabbed him.

"I'm not a fool, sweetie. I know what happens if we touch."

He grabbed her arm.

“Get off me. Get him off me! Doctor, no. Let go! Please Doctor, let go!”

“It’s moving, time’s moving!”

“Get him off me! Doctor!”

“I’m sorry, River. It’s the only way.”

Utah. Lake Silencio. For a moment. Then, back to the pyramid.

“Cuff him.”

“Oh, why do you always have handcuffs? It’s the only way. We’re the opposite poles of the disruption. If we touch, we short out the differential. Time can begin again.”

“And I’ll be by a lakeside killing you.”

“And time won’t fall apart. The clocks will tick. Reality will continue. There isn’t another way.”

“I didn’t say there was, sweetie. There are so many theories about you and I, you know.”

“Idle gossip.”

“Archaeology.”

“Same thing.”

“Am I the woman who marries you, or the woman who murders you?”

“I don’t want to marry you.”

“I don’t want to murder you.”

“This is no fun at all.”

“It isn’t, is it?”

“Doctor, what’s that?” interrupted her mother.

“The pyramid above us, how many Silents do you have trapped inside it?”

“None, said Kovarian, “they’re not trapped. They never have been. They’ve been waiting for this, Doctor. For you.”

“They’re out! All of them!”

He father barred the door as Silents began to slaughter her soldiers.

"They're out! All of them! No one gets in here! Ma'am, my men out there should be able to lock this down. We have them outnumbered."

"And you're wearing eye drives based on mine, I think. Oops."

"What do you mean?"

One of River's doctors fell to the ground, screaming, as electricity sparked and surged through her eye drive, her eyepatch turned memory storage unit that enabled her to retain knowledge of Silents despite their memory powers.

"Help her! Help her!"

"She's dead."

Everyone's eye drives began to activate, plunging them into immense pain.

"Eye drives off now. Remove them."

"The Silence would never allow an advantage without taking one themselves. The effects will vary from person to person. Either death or debilitating agony. But they will take you all, one by one."

Kovarian's own eye drive began to activate.

"What are you doing? No, it's me. Don't be stupid. You need me. Stop it. Stop that!"

"We could stop this right now, you and I," said the Doctor.

"Get it off me."

"Amy, tell her."

"We've been working on something. Just let us show you."

"There's no point. There's nothing you can do. My time is up."

"We're doing this for you!"

"Then people are dying for me. I won't thank you for that, Amelia Pond."

"Get it."

"Just let us show you," pleaded River.

"Please. Captain Williams, how long do we have?"

"Er, a couple of minutes."

"That's enough. We're going to the Receptor Room at the top of the pyramid. I hope you're ready for a climb."

The wind blew gently around them at the top of the pyramid.

"What this?" asked the Doctor. "Oh, it's a timey-wimey distress beacon. Who built this?"

"I'm the child of the TARDIS. I understand the physics."

"But that's all you've got, a distress beacon."

"I've been sending out a message. A distress call. Outside the bubble of our time, the universe is still turning, and I've sent a message everywhere. To the future and the past, the beginning and the end of everything. 'The Doctor is dying. Please, please help'."

"River! River, this is ridiculous. That would mean nothing to anyone. It's insane. Worse, it's stupid. You embarrass me."

"We've barricaded the door," said her mother, having joined them with her father in tow. "We've got a few minutes. Just tell him. Just tell him River."

"Those reports of the sun spots and the solar flares. They're wrong. There aren't any. It's not the sun, it's you. The sky is full of a million, million voices saying yes, of course we'll help. You've touched so many lives, saved so many people. Did you think when your time came, you'd really have to do more than just ask? You've decided that the universe is better off without you, but the universe doesn't agree."

"River, no one can help me. A fixed point has been altered. Time is disintegrating."

"I can't let you die."

"But I have to die."

"Shut up! I can't let you die without knowing you are loved by so many, and so much, and by no one more than me."

"River, you and I, we know what this means. We are ground zero of an explosion that will engulf all reality. Billions on billions will suffer and die."

"I'll suffer if I have to kill you."

"More than every living thing in the universe?"

"Yes."

"River, River, why do you had have to be this? Melody Pond, your daughter. I hope you're both proud."

"I'm not sure I completely understand," said her father.

"We got married and had a kid and that's her," said her mother.

"Okay."

"Amy, uncuff me now. Okay, I need a strip of cloth about a foot long. Anything will do. Nevermind."

He removed his bowtie.

"River, take one end of this. Wrap it around your hand and hold it out to me."

"What am I doing?"

"As you're told. Now, we're in the middle of a combat zone, so we'll have to do the quick version. Captain Williams, say 'I consent and gladly give'."

"To what?"

"Just say it. Please."

"I consent and gladly give."

"Need you to say it too, mother of the bride."

"I consent and gladly give."

"Now, River, I'm about to whisper something in your ear, and you have to remember it very, very carefully, and tell no one what I said."

He leaned in so very close, and whispered something that made the hairs on the back of her neck stand up.

"Look into my eye," he said, and she did, and there he was, the Doctor, the real Doctor, waving at her and brandishing his stetson from inside the Teselecta's artificial eye she'd taken for his own.

"I just told you my name," he lied. "Now, there you go, River Song. Melody Pond. You're the woman who married me. And wife, I have a request. This world is dying and it's my fault, and I can't bear it another day. Please, help me. There isn't another way."

"Then you may kiss the bride."

"I'll make it a good one."

"You better."

He did.

They did.

THE IMPOSSIBLE ASTRONAUT | THE WEDDING OF RIVER SONG

On the twenty-second of April, 2011, River rose from Lake Silencio. The Doctor walked over to her. Her parents were in the distance, along with the figure she knew to be herself from the future, but she had eyes only for the Doctor.

"Hello. It's okay. I know it's you."

She opened her visor and the Teselecta and the spaceman, the Doctor and River Song, the newlyweds, stared at each other for a moment.

"Well then."

They exchanged a few words of private understanding between husband and wife, then River shot the Teselecta. It staggered back in a pastiche of regeneration, then she shot it again. Her job done, that private inside joke between newlyweds fooling the universe, she walked back into the lake. Her future self fired bullets at her, but she surely would know then and well as she knew now that they'd be ineffective.

They each played their parts. Husband and wife.

FIRST NIGHT | LAST NIGHT

Her freedom from the spaceman at the bottom of the lake wasn't from the Silence, but from the law. Her freedom from the Silence came at the price of imprisonment at the Stormcage Containment Facility, in the fifty-second century, for a crime she didn't commit - killing the Doctor. She was sentenced to twelve-thousand consecutive life sentences as punishment. She was to be in prison for all her days.

Her nights, however?

On her first night in prison, she was interrupted from examining the empty book the Doctor had left her at the hospital after she'd pushed her regenerations into him by the sound of the TARDIS materialising in her cell. She rushed into it, to see her husband decked out in a rather loud white tuxedo. A similarly loud dress hung prominently in the TARDIS.

"The dress is a little daring," she said.

"Yep, so I went for this instead."

"Are we going out?"

"Parents are asleep. How's Stormcage?"

"I'm on the first night of twelve-thousand consecutive life sentences, kind of early to say. Where are we going?"

"Calderon Beta, boring planet of the chip shops. But there is a four-hundred-foot tree growing out of a clifftop on the north side of a mountain in the middle of the sea. And if you take the lift to the top and look up, at exactly twelve minutes past midnight on the twenty-first of September, 2360, you can see more stars in one sky than at any other moment in the history of the universe. It's like daylight, only magic. You could read a book by it."

"Is it okay if I don't?"

"We've got ten minutes. Get dressed."

"Oh, that's so close to the perfect sentence."

"Hm...did you bring the diary?"

"It's a diary?"

"It is now, because River, from now on there are rules."

"Ooh, you've gone all strict. Not that I mind."

"River, you and I, it's all in the wrong order. We never meet in sequence. You put everything in the diary so we know where we are."

"Put what in the diary? Sweetie, I'm in the highest security prison of all the known universe."

"River Song could walk in and out of the prison like the walls aren't there."

"I'm River Song."

"Then you'll be fine. If you don't like the dress, there's plenty more in the wardrobe - first right, second left, just past the helter-skelter."

She followed his directions. As she did so, she thought she could hear a woman's voice from the console room. She popped around the corner to inquire.

"Doctor, were you talking to someone?"

"No no, just me."

She went to get changed but doubled back out want to ask if he'd reconsider outfits, so she made her way back to the console room only to find a second Doctor exiting the TARDIS.

"There two of you! The mind races."

"Right, come on you, let's go and see the stars."

"But I haven't changed."

"And you never will, River, never ever."

"What was the other you doing here?"

"Sorry, can't say."

"What's that word you use?"

"Spoilers."

"I like that word."

"I thought you might."

"Doctor, you and your secrets, you'll be the death of me."

THE PANDORICA OPENS

Their first date together proceeded splendidly. The Doctor returned River to Stormcage afterwards, and that pattern of daytime imprisonment and nighttime excitement became a pattern for her. More dates with the Doctor, and adventures of her own as she grew more adept at breaking out of prison, transpired. Jim the Fish, Marilyn Monroe, her diary slower grew fuller as her adventures continued.

While she never considered herself really a “Time Lord” (she was happier with “child of the TARDIS”, and even happier with “just” “River Song”), she did itch for time travel that wasn’t tethered to the Doctor visiting with his TARDIS, and began to search for such a thing in earnest whenever she managed to break out of prison.

One night, after being caught and stuck back into her cell, she heard a guard outside on the telephone use the word ‘doctor’.

“Give me that,” she said. “Seriously, just give it to me. I’m entitled to phone calls.”

He did. She was.

“Doctor?”

“No,” answered Winston Churchill, “and neither are you. Where is he?”

“You’re phoning the Time Vortex. It doesn’t always work. But the TARDIS is smart. She’s rerouted the call. Talk quickly. This connection will last less than a minute.”

He did.

“Doctor Song,” interrupted the guard, “are you finished with that?”

She handed the phone back to him.

“You’re new here, aren’t you?”

“First day.”

“Then I’m very sorry.”

She kissed him.

She wondered if the other guards would be hard on him when they found him. She scribbled a stick figure on the wall, complete with the word ‘bye’, to illustrate her ruse. And away she went.

At the Royal Collection River scurried about, having found the painting she’d come for.

“This is the Royal Collection,” came a voice as the lights turned on, “and I’m the bloody Queen. What are you doing here?”

“It’s about the Doctor, ma’am. You met him once, didn’t you? I know he came here.”

“The Doctor?”

“He’s in trouble. I need to find him.”

“Then why are you stealing a painting?”

“Look at it. I need to find the Doctor, and I need to show him this.”

At the Maldovarium, River was engaged in conversation with Dorium, the club’s namesake and owner.

“Well now, word on the belt is you’re looking for time travel,” he said.

“Are you selling?”

He snapped his fingers, and a being approached with a box.

“A vortex manipulator, fresh off the wrist of a handsome Time Agent.”

He opened the box, then sighed.

“I said off the wrist...”

The being took the box away.

“Not cheap, Doctor Song. Have you brought me a pretty toy?”

She removed one of her earrings.

“This is a Calisto Pulse. It can disarm microexplosives from up to twenty feet.”

“What kind of microexplosives?”

“The kind I just put in your wine.”

She got her own method of time travel. Off she went, to the oldest cliff face in the universe, to use it.

She awaited the Doctor in Roman-occupied Britain in 2 AD. Well, that wasn’t all she did. But eventually she was alerted that he’d arrived, and into her tent he and her mother burst.

“Hello sweetie.”

“River, hi,” said her mother.

“You graffitied the oldest cliff face in the universe.”

“You wouldn’t answer your phone.”

She offered the painting to him.

“What’s this?”

“It’s a painting. Your friend Vincent. One of his final works. He had visions, didn’t he? I thought you ought to know about this one.”

“Doctor? Doctor, what is this?”

They all gazed at it, the painting too close to *Starry Night*, but with an exploding TARDIS as the centrepiece.

Some time later, the three of them were galloping on horseback.

“Why is it exploding?”

“I assume it’s some kind of warning.”

“What, something’s going to happen to the TARDIS?”

“It might not be that literal. Anyway, this is where he wanted you. Date and map reference on the door sign, see?”

“Does it have a title?”

“The Pandora Opens.”

“Come on, ya!” the Doctor urged his horse.

“The Pandora?” asked her mother. “What is it?”

“A box, a cage, a prison. It was built to contain the most feared thing in all the universe.”

“And it’s a fairy tale, a legend. It can’t be real.”

“If it is real, it’s here and it’s opening, and it’s got something to do with your TARDIS exploding. Hidden, obviously. Buried for centuries. You won’t find it on a map.”

“No, but if you buried the most dangerous thing in the universe, you’d want to remember where you put it.”

Once they reached their destination of Stonehenge, they dismounted, and River and the Doctor began scanning the stones.

“How come it’s not new?”

“Because it’s already old. It’s been here thousands of years. No one knows exactly how long.”

“Okay, this Pandora thing. Last time we saw you, you warned us about it, after we climbed out of the Byzantium.”

River had done no such thing yet.

“Spoilers.”

“No, but you told the Doctor you’d see him again when the Pandora opens.”

“Maybe I did, but I haven’t yet. But I will have. Doctor, I’m picking up fry particles everywhere. Energy weapons discharged on this site.”

“If the Pandora is here, it contains the mightiest warrior in history. Now, half the galaxy would want a piece of that. Maybe even fight over it. We need to get down there.”

Some time later, they managed to bedeck each corner of the altar stone with the appropriate devices.

“Right then. Ready.”

Machinery whirred, and the stone moved aside to reveal a staircase opening down into the ground.

“The Underhenge...”

They descended, unbarring a huge door along the way, and found themselves face to face with the Pandora.

“It’s a Pandora.”

“More than just a fairy tale.”

“There was a goblin, or a trickster, or a warrior. A nameless, terrible thing, soaked in the blood of a billion galaxies. The most feared being in all the cosmos. And nothing could stop it, or hold it, or reason with it. One day it would just drop out of the sky and tear down your world.”

“How did it end up in there?”

“You know fairy tales - a good wizard tricked it.”

“I hate good wizards in fairy tales. They always turn out to be him.”

“So, it’s kind of like Pandora’s Box, then? Almost the same name.”

“Sorry, what?”

“The story. Pandora’s Box, with all the worst things in the world in it. That was my favourite book when I was a kid. What’s wrong?”

“Your favourite school topic. Your favourite story. Never ignore a coincidence, unless you’re busy. In which case, always ignore a coincidence.”

“So can you open it?”

“Easily. Anyone can break into a prison. But I’d rather know what I’m going to find first.”

“You won’t have long to wait. It’s already opening. There are layers and layers of security protocols in there, and they’re being disabled one by one. Like it’s being unlocked from the inside.”

“How long do we have?”

“Hours at the most.”

“What kind of security?”

“Everything. Deadlocks, time stops, matter lines.”

“What could need all that?”

“What could get past all that?”

“Think of the fear that went into making this box. What could inspire that level of fear? Hello, you. Have we met?”

“So why would it start to open now?”

“No idea.”

“And how could Vincent have known about it? He won’t even be born for centuries.”

"The stones. These stones are great big transmitters, broadcasting a warning to everyone, everywhere, to every time zone. The Pandorica is opening."

"Doctor, everyone everywhere?"

"Even poor Vincent heard it, in his dreams. But what's in there? What could justify all this?"

"Doctor, everyone?"

"Anything that powerful, I'd know about it. Why don't I know?"

"Doctor, you said everyone could hear it. So who else is coming?"

"Oh."

"Oh? Oh, what?"

"Okay. If it is basically a transmitter, we should be able to fold back the signal."

"Doing it."

He did it.

"Doing what?"

"Stonehenge is transmitting. It's been transmitting for a while, so who heard?"

"Okay, should be feeding back to you now. River, what's out there?"

"Give me a moment."

"River, quickly. Anything?"

"Around this planet there are at least ten thousand starships."

"At least?"

"Ten thousand, a hundred thousand, a million, I don't know. There's too many readings."

"What kind of starships?"

"Maintaining orbit", interrupted a harsh robotic voice.

"I obey," came another voice of the same kind. "Shield cover compromised on ion sectors."

"Daleks. Those are Daleks."

"Scan detects no temporal activity."

"Soft grid scan commencing."

"Reverse thrust for compensatory stabilisation."

"Daleks, Doctor."

"Launch preliminary armaments protocol."

"Yes. Okay, okay, okay, okay. Dalek fleet, minimum twelve thousand battleships, armed to the teeth. Ah! But we've got surprise on our side. They'll never expect three people to attack twelve thousand Dalek battleships. Because we'd be killed instantly. So it would be a fairly short surprise. Forget surprise"

"Course correction proceeding," came another robotic voice, quite different in tone.

"Doctor, Cyberships."

"No, Dalek ships. Listen to them. Those are Dalek ships."

"Yes. Dalek ships and Cyberships."

"Well, we need to start a fight, turn them on each other. I mean, that's easy. It's the Daleks. They're so cross."

"Sontaran. Four battlefleets."

"Sontarans! Talk about cross, who stole all their handbags?"

"Terileptil. Slitheen, Chelonian, Nestene, Drahvin. Sycorax, Haemogoth, Zygon, Atraxi, Draconian. They're all here for the Pandorica."

"What are you? What could you possibly be?"

"What do we do?"

"Doctor, listen to me. Everything that ever hated you is coming here tonight. You can't win this. You can't even fight it. Doctor, this once, just this one time, please, you have to run."

"Run where?"

"Fight how?"

“The greatest military machine in the history of the universe.”

“What is it? The Daleks?”

“No. No, no, no, no, no. The Romans.”

River returned to the Roman encampment and was promptly taken prisoner by the now-retumed commander.

“So,” he began, “I return to my command after one week and discover we’ve been playing host to Cleopatra. Who’s in Egypt. And dead.”

“Yes. Funny how things work out.”

The sound of a spaceship buzzing high above them punctured the conversation.

“The sky is falling and you make jokes. Who are you?”

“When you fight barbarians, what must they think of you?”

“Oh, riddles now.”

“Where do you think they come from?”

“A place more deadly and more powerful and more impatient than their tiny minds can imagine.”

River brandished her gun invented millennia after all these men would die, and disintegrated a nearby wooden stand filled with ornaments.

“Where do I come from? Your world has visitors. You’re all barbarians now.”

“What is that? Tell me what!”

“A fool would say the work of the gods, but you’ve been a soldier too long to believe there are gods watching over us. There is, however, a man. And tonight, he’s going to need your help.”

“Sir?” asked a centurion poking his head into the tent.

“One moment.”

The commander and centurion shared a brief, hushed conversation.

“Well,” the commander said to River, “it seems you have a volunteer.”

The volunteer was brought to River. She didn't recognise him. As if he was just another centurion. As if she'd never seen the man before in her lives.

As if he wasn't her father.

They managed to rally fifty more volunteers together, and off they went to Stonehenge. River scouted around on horseback, as more and more spaceships filled up the sky.

"You're surrounded," she radioed the Doctor. "Have you got a plan?"

"Yes. Now hurry up and get the TARDIS here. I need equipment."

She did so. Within the TARDIS, she swept over the controls, operating her feeling as intuitive as always.

"Okay," she said as she tried to dematerialise the TARDIS, but the ship jerked, refusing to cooperate.

"What's the matter with you? What are you doing? What's wrong?"

The TARDIS lurched in flight through the vortex, before eventually coming to a halt.

"Okay. You okay now?"

She exited the TARDIS and found herself outside a quaint house.

"Why have you brought me here?"

Scorch marks adorned the lawn, and the front door hung off its hinges.

"Okay, so something's been here."

She followed the signal of her scanner up the stairs of the house. The house, she came to understand as she explored a bedroom inside, was her mother's.

"Amy. Oh, Doctor, why do I let you out?"

Exploring the room, she found some books of interest. 'The Stormy of Roman Britain'. 'The Legend of Pandora's Box'.

"Oh no."

After some more exploring of the house, the Doctor contacted her again.

"The TARDIS, where is it? Hurry up."

“Don’t raise your voice, don’t look alarmed, just listen. They’re not real. They can’t be. They’re all right here in the story book. Those actual Romans. The ones I sent you, the ones you’re with right now. They’re all in a book in Amy’s house. A children’s picture book.”

“What are you even doing there?”

“It doesn’t matter. The TARDIS went wrong. Doctor, how is this possible?”

“Something’s using her memories. Amy’s memories.”

“But how?”

“You said something had been there.”

“Yes. There’s burn marks on the grass outside. Landing patterns.”

“If they’ve been to her house, they could have used her psychic residue. Structures can hold memories, that’s why houses have ghosts. They could’ve taken a snapshot of Amy’s memories. But why?”

“Doctor, who are those Romans?”

“Projections or duplicates.”

“But they were helping us. My lipstick even worked.”

“They might think they’re real. The perfect disguise. They actually believe their own cover story, right until they’re activated.”

“Doctor, that centurion...”

River looked at a photograph of her mother in a policewoman outfit, alongside...that first volunteer centurion. Dressed as a Roman.

“It’s a trap, it has to be. They used Amy to construct a scenario you’d believe, to get close to you.”

“Why? Who’d do that? What for? It doesn’t make sense. River? River? River, what’s happening?”

“I don’t know,” she said, back in the uncooperative TARDIS. “It’s the engines. Doctor, there’s something wrong with the TARDIS, like something else is controlling it.”

“You’re flying it wrong.”

"I'm flying it perfectly. You taught me."

"Where are you? What's the date reading?"

The TARDIS displayed the date. 2010. The twenty-sixth of JUNE.

"You need to get out of there now. Any other time zone. Just go."

"I can't break free."

"Well then shut down the TARDIS. Shut down everything!"

"I can't! Something else is flying it. An external force. I've lost control."

"But how? Why? Listen to me, just land her anywhere. Emergency landing, now. There are cracks in time. I've seen them everywhere, and they're getting wider. The TARDIS exploding is what causes them, but we can stop the cracks ever happening if you just land her."

"It's not safe. Doctor?" She managed to land. "I'm down. I've landed."

"Okay, just walk out of the doors. If there's no one inside, the TARDIS engines shut down automatically. Just get out of there."

"I'm going."

"Run!"

"Doctor! Doctor, I can't open the doors! Doctor, I can't open the doors! Doctor, please, I've got seconds!"

No response came. River hooked up the TARDIS engines to the main door handles. She kept trying, frantically, to escape the TARDIS, but to no avail, until...she managed to get the doors open, only to reveal she was parked up right against an impassable rock wall.

"I'm sorry, my love."

The TARDIS exploded.

THE BIG BANG

"I'm sorry, my love."

The TARDIS exploded.

"I'm sorry, my love."

The TARDIS exploded.

"I'm sorry, my love."

The TARDIS exploded.

Or rather, the TARDIS was exploding. It had sealed off the console room and put River in a time loop to try and save her life. At the heart of the explosion, time flowed differently.

"I'm sorry, my love. I'm sorry, my love. I'm sorry, my love."

Eventually, as River ran to open the TARDIS doors she found the Doctor waiting there instead.

"Hi, honey. I'm home."

"And what sort of time do you call this?"

After a brief conversation where her dear future husband brought her up to speed, they zapped them down to the rooftop of the National Museum with her vortex manipulator, now upon the Doctor's wrist for some reason. Her mother and the centurion were on the rooftop already.

"Amy! And the plastic centurion?"

"It's okay, he's on our side."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"I dated a Nestene duplicate once," she shared. "Swappable head. It did keep things fresh. Right then, I have questions, but number one is this - what in the name of sanity have you got on your head?"

"It's a fez. I wear a fez now. Fezzes are cool."

Amy snatched the fez, threw it in the air, and River promptly shot it into pieces. Those floating pieces were soon joined by a stone Dalek slowly levitating up.

"Exterminate!"

"Run, run! Move, move! Go!"

“Come on!”

The four of them ran down into the museum.

“Doctor, come on.”

“Shush. It’s moving away, finding another way in. It needs to restore its power before it can attack again. Now, that means we’ve got exactly four and a half minutes before it’s at lethal capacity.”

“How do you know?”

“Because that’s when it’s due to kill me.”

“Kill you?” asked River. “What do you mean, kill you?”

“Oh, shut up. Never mind. How can that Dalek even exist? It was erased from time and then it came back. How?”

“You said the light from the Pandorica.”

“It’s not a light, it’s a restoration field. But nevermind, call it a light. That light brought Amy back, restored her, but how could it bring back a Dalek when Daleks have never existed?”

“Okay, tell us.”

“When the TARDIS blew up, it caused a total event collapse. A time explosion. And that explosion blasted every atom in every moment of the universe. Except-”

“Except inside the Pandorica.”

“The perfect prison. And inside it, perfectly preserved, a few billion atoms of the universe as it was. In theory, you could extrapolate the whole universe from a single one of them, like, like cloning a body from a single cell. And we’ve got the bumper family pack.”

“No, no, too fast. I’m not getting it.”

“The box contains a memory of the universe, and the light transmits the memory, and that’s how we’re going to do it.”

“Do what?”

“Relight the fire. Reboot the universe. Come on!”

“Doctor, you're being completely ridiculous. The Pandorica partially restored one Dalek. If it can't even reboot a single life form properly, how's it reboot the whole of reality?”

“What if we give it a moment of infinite power? What if we can transmit the light from the Pandorica to every particle of space and time simultaneously?”

“Well, that would be lovely, dear, but we can't, because it's completely impossible.”

“Ah, no, you see, it's not. It's almost completely impossible. One spark is all we need.”

“For what?”

“Big Bang Two! Now listen-”

The stone Dalek reappeared and shot the Dalek.

“Exterminate! Exterminate!”

“Get back, River, get back now!”

“Exterminate!”

The centurion shot at the Dalek, and it powered down.

“Doctor?” said River. “Doctor, it's me, River, can you hear me? What is it? What do you need?”

The Doctor activated the vortex manipulator and vanished.

“Where did he go? Damn it, he could be anywhere.”

“He went downstairs,” said Amy. “Twelve minutes ago.”

“Show me!”

“River...he died.”

“Systems restoring, you will be exterminated!”

“We've got to move; that thing's coming back to life.”

“You go to the Doctor. I'll be right with you.”

Her mother and the centurion left.

“You will be exterminated!”

"Not yet. Your systems are still restoring, which means your shield density is compromised. One alpha meson burst through your eyestalk would kill you stone dead."

"Records indicate you will show mercy. You are an associate of the Doctor's."

"I'm River Song - check your records again."

"Mercy."

"Say it again."

"Mercy."

"One more time."

"Mercy!"

After finishing with the Dalek, River made her way down to the museum reception. The Doctor's body was not there.

"How could he have moved? He was dead. Doctor? Doctor?"

"But he was dead..."

"Who told you that?" River asked her mother.

"He did."

"Rule one - the Doctor lies."

"Where's the Dalek?"

"It died."

In the anomaly exhibition, they found the Doctor inside of the opened Pandora.

"Doctor!"

"Why did he tell us he was dead?"

"We were a diversion. As long as the Dalek was chasing us, he could work down here."

"Doctor, can you hear me? What were you doing?"

Outside, the flames of the TARDIS and the sun were growing brighter.

"What's happening?"

"Reality's collapsing. It's speeding up. Look at this room."

"Where'd everything go?"

"History's being erased. Time's running out. Doctor, what were you doing? Tell us. Doctor!"

"Big Bang Two," murmured the Doctor.

"The Big Bang. That's the beginning of the universe, right?"

"What, and Big Bang Two is the bang that brings us back? Is that what you mean?"

"Oh."

"What?"

"The TARDIS is still burning. It's exploding at every point in history. If you threw the Pandorica into the explosion, right into the heart of the fire..."

"Then what?"

"Then let there be light. The light from the Pandorica would explode everywhere at once, just like he said."

"That would work? That would bring everything back?"

"A restoration field powered by an exploding TARDIS, happening at every moment in history. Oh, that's brilliant - it might even work. He's wired the vortex manipulator to the rest of the box."

"Why?"

"So he can take it with him. He's going to fly the Pandorica into the heart of the explosion."

After this had sunk in for everyone, the centurion tried to comfort her mother.

"Are you okay?"

"Are you?"

"No."

"Well, shut up then!"

"Amy," said River, "he wants to talk to you."

"So, what happens here? Big Bang Two? What happens to us?"

"We all wake up where we ought to be. None of this ever happens and we don't remember it."

"River, tell me he comes back, too."

"The Doctor will be the heart of the explosion."

"So?"

"So all the cracks in time will close, but he'll be on the wrong side, trapped in the never-space, the void between the worlds. All memory of him will be purged from the universe. He will never have been born. Now, please. He wants to talk to you before he goes."

"Not to you?"

"He doesn't really know me yet. Now he never will."

She contemplated that, as her mother went over to him. What a tangled web of life they had lived. This sort of erasure, it unsettled River. She wished life had some sort of guarantee of continuity. He wouldn't even die, he'd be unwritten. Didn't everyone deserve at least death, and the promise and mystery what didn't come after? The Romans and their inane insistence on gods amused her, but it also made her sad. She'd travelled too far and learned too much to ever believe in any sort of gods or afterlife, but she wished they were real as much as anyone - she just knew they weren't.

Her train of thought was interrupted by the sun flaring outside and the Pandorica shaking inside.

"Doctor! It's speeding up!"

The Doctor exchanged a few more quiet words with her mother, then the Pandorica closed around him.

"Back!" River yelled. "Get back!"

The Pandorica flew up and out the window. River's receiver buzzed.

"It's from the Doctor."

"What does it say?"

“Geronimo.”

One big bang later, River left her mother a wedding present. Something old. Something new. Something borrowed. Something blue.

And she remembered.

Outside her mother’s house, the TARDIS waited for the Doctor. River waited too. She called out as he eventually came to approach it.

“Did you dance? Well, you always dance at weddings, don’t you?”

“You tell me.”

“Spoilers.”

The Doctor returned her diary and vortex manipulator to her.

“The writing’s all back, but I didn’t peek,” he clarified.

“Thank you.”

“Are you married, River?”

“Are you asking?”

“Yes.”

“Yes.”

“No, hang on, did you think I was asking you to marry me, or, or, or asking if you were married?”

“Yes.”

“No, but was that yes, or yes?”

“Yes.”

It was her parent’s wedding night. The night of her conception, River surmised. Surely that meant he’d know who she was soon. And if that was soon for him that meant Lake Silencio was soon for him too. He was so young, and with so much yet to come.

“River, who are you?”

“You’re going to find out very soon now. And I’m sorry, but that’s when everything changes.”

She activated her vortex manipulator and zapped away.

He had so much ahead of him.

And so did she.

LAST NIGHT

Now with a vortex manipulator and the ability to time travel alone and on her own terms, River’s adventures increased exponentially. Oh, there was still nighttime dates with the Doctor, of course but there were increasing and more widely-spanning adventures on her own as well.

On one adventure together, four years after her initial imprisonment, she’d ended up discussing the nature of her time-crossed life with the Doctor. The Doctor, unusually talkative had shown her his cot as they’d connected over the peculiarities and isolation of their identities. What had started out as a rant about Gallifreyan attitudes towards birth, featuring several impassioned utterances of the word “looms”, had ended in a bed very different to a cot, in a situation very different to...”looming”.

On one adventure alone, five years after her initial imprisonment, she ended up being chased by several trigger-happy Sontarans that objected to, well, a few things she was responsible for. In her efforts to flee from them, she ended up on Calderon Beta yet again. She noticed the TARDIS was present there as well, even though they’d hardly scheduled a date together this night. How smitten must he be to have returned to the site of their first date?

She ran into the TARDIS as Sontarans continued shooting at her from behind.

“River!” exclaimed the Doctor as she burst inside the console room.

“I knew you’d come back here, you nostalgic idiot. Hold me!” She collapsed into his arms and fainted a faint.

“River? River? River? River? River? Are you okay? Talk to me. Okay, um, uh, breathe, breathe, come on. Got to keep breathing. Uh...River, you are holding your breath...”

“You’re a fine one to talk about holding. How many hands do you have?”

“Get up! What are you doing? Who’s shooting at you?”

“Oh, just a few Sontarans. Chased me halfway across the galaxy. I probably shouldn’t have asked them if they were on a hen night.”

“River, you can’t do things like that.”

“Or what? You’ve already had me banged up in gaol for give years. What else are you going to do? Spank me?”

“Now, that...”

“Doctor,” she said as she noticed a striking golden dress hung prominently in the TARDIS, “have you brought someone else here? Does anyone agree to wear that dress? Where is she?”

“River, think it through.”

“This happened the last time we were here. You brought someone else.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Yes, you did. I heard you talking to her.” She went to examine some other TARDIS rooms. When she thought she heard another voice back in the console room, she poked her head back in.

“Were you talking to someone?”

“No no dear, just me.”

She went back to exploring. Her efforts fruitless, she re-entered the console room.

“Who were you talking to?”

“You. I’m taking you back to Stormcage, Dr. Song.”

“Oh, at least give me a lift. You know what this thing,” she said gesturing to the vortex manipulator, “does to my hair.”

“It’s always like that.”

With a wave of the sonic screwdriver, her vortex manipulator activated, and she was back in her cell in Stormcage.

A GOOD MAN GOES TO WAR

River continued to have many adventures, some alone, some with the Doctor. The way he'd swagger into the TARDIS with a snap of his fingers, it enchanted her, but as she saw more and more of the universe on her own, she came to a more natural admiration for him, more love than obsession.

She met the green woman she'd remembered as a baby, Madame Vastra, and had adventures with her wife and Sontaran associate, what the Doctor sometimes referred to as the Paternoster Gang. She saw more and more people, human and alien alike, more and more societies, more and more religions. So many, and people had such trouble sifting through them all.

Increasingly her outright dismissal of religion - which she told herself was not just the product of rightfully resenting the cult she'd been brought up in, but an enlightened intellectual viewpoint she'd come to in her own time - wavered. She never believed, of course, but so many did. While that led many to so much pain, both their own and that they'd inflict on others, it led others to peace and absolution.

What came to trouble her more and more was how mythologised the Doctor himself became on several worlds. He left such great marks wherever he went that many struggled to cope healthily with his impact, the sheer weight of his presence even long after the fact. When she was younger, things like the TARDIS painted by Van Gogh had struck her as scintillating, but now they had begun to disquiet her. As brilliant as he was, he was just a man. Her man. But entire societies lived in awe of him, and fear of him.

It was no obfuscate that she went to such lengths to obfuscate her presence in her travels, and the aftereffects of her adventures. Hallucinogenic lipstick, disguises, mindwipes, these became the tools of her trade. She wanted if her and the Doctor's crossing timelines would ever become so complicated she'd have to start mindwiping him. A simple mindwipe in the right place and time could have prevented so much of the religious fervour that his name - well, his title - raised up. The chaos he wrought, the mysteries he left in his wake...the Imp of the Pandorica was a fitting title in the end.

Perhaps it was the chaos of religion, the mysteries underpinning it, that were the problem, more so than the spiritual salvation and structure it could provide.

River stayed far away from examining the religion she'd been brought up in, but the more she ruminated on these sorts of matters, the more she wondered. Her future was one thing, comforting and open and free. Her past was frightening and so unknown.

But she was an adventurer. And so she resolved to confront and take control of her past. She had some broad strokes from the Doctor, and followed up on them, and came to know of how she'd been stolen away from Demon's Run as a baby by Kovarian's sect

of the Silence. She dare not interfere while her younger self was still there (she still wasn't sure how she'd eventually handle that from the other end, when she would eventually be the River on the other side of Lake Silencio, watching herself as an impossible astronaut rising from the depths), but after she'd been taken...yes, that was the time.

So, after the storied battle of Demon's Run had concluded, River zapped herself onboard to see the aftermath.

"Well then soldier," she said to the Doctor. "How goes the day?"

"Where the hell have you been? Every time you've asked, I have been there. Where the hell were you today?"

"I couldn't have prevented this."

"You could have tried!"

"And so, my love, could you. I know you're not alright. But hold tight, Amy, because you're going to be."

"You think I wanted this? I didn't do this. This, this wasn't me!"

"This was exactly you. All this. All of it. You make them so afraid. When you began, all those years ago, sailing off to see the universe, did you ever think you'd become this? The man who can turn an army around at the mention of his name. Doctor. The word for healer and wise man throughout the universe. We get that word from you, you know. But if you carry on the way you are, what might that word come to mean? To the people of the Gamma Forests, the word Doctor means mighty warrior. How far you've come. And now they've taken a child, the child of your best friends, and they're going to turn her into a weapon just to bring you down. And all this, my love, in fear of you."

"Who are you?"

"Oh look, your cot. Haven't seen that in a very long while."

"No, no, you tell me. Tell me who you are."

She'd always assumed the Doctor worked that out himself. On her parent's wedding night, when she'd told him he was so close to that truth, it was under that assumption. But talking to him now, seeing how blind he'd been to the impact he'd been making across the universe, on his influence, on what his name was coming to mean...she'd

realised she had plenty to teach him. He didn't work out everything. This was her moment to teach him.

"I am telling you. Can't you read? She indicated the Old High Gallifreyan on the cot.

He understood

"Hello."

"Hello."

"But, but, that means..."

"I'm afraid it does."

"Ooh, but you and I, we, we, we, er-"

"Yes," said River, cutting him off before his miming got any more explicit in front of her parents. He flapped around with glee.

"How do I look?"

"Amazing."

"I'd better be."

"Yes, you'd better be."

"Vastra and Jenny, till the next time. Rory and Amy, I know where to find your daughter, and on my life, she will be safe. River, get them all home."

He ran into the TARDIS and materialised away.

"Doctor!" her father cried out.

"No! Where are you going? No!"

"Where's he going and what did you tell him?" her mother asked her, fury in her eyes.

"Amy, you have to stay calm."

Amy picked up a gun.

"Tell me what you told the Doctor."

"Amy, no. Stop it!"

"It's okay, Rory. She's fine. She's good. It's the TARDIS translation matrix; it takes a while to kick in with the written word. You have to concentrate."

"I still can't read it."

"It's because it's Gallifreyan and doesn't translate. But this will." She handed her mother the prayer leaf with her name as a baby on it. "It's your daughter's name in the language of the Forest."

"I know my daughter's name."

"Except they don't have a word for pond, because the only water in the forest is the river. The Doctor will find your daughter, and he will care for her, whatever it takes. And I know that. It's me. I'm Melody. I'm your daughter."

THE IMPOSSIBLE ASTRONAUT

Revealing who she was to both the Doctor and her parents had felt good, an enormous weight off her back, but at their point in their lives they were still so tangled in the events Kovarian had wrought upon them that the mood wasn't exactly celebratory for any of them. Her parents were shocked, but too struck by losing her as a baby to demonstrate particular relief. River could hardly blame them for that. It disturbed her just as much that her childhood had been stolen from her, but then, that was a different River. That wasn't even a River. That was Melody.

River clung to that. River had only with the one Doctor so far, but knew he had even more faces than she'd had. She'd like to get around to all of them one day, but...she knew now that it was this Doctor, her Doctor, that learned who she was. That didn't predispose her from meeting earlier Doctors at all, but did make things a mite tricky - and exciting!

So if she encountered any Doctor earlier and they acted like it was their first time meeting her, she'd have to either disguise herself so they didn't realise who she was, or just erase their memory after the fact. She certainly had the tools to do so. But if they were already aware of who she was, she was in the clear, as long as she kept the true nature of her identity secret - not that earlier Doctors would have met her parents yet anyway.

She loved the Doctor, she loved their dates, she loved the quiet - yet explicit - understanding they had about the nature of their relationship (such as it was) and their thoughts on each other's relations with other people. But it wasn't something as reliable or consistent as a...River hated to think "real" relationship, so she settled for "linear"

instead. That excited her, truly, but she did wonder sometimes if one day she'd yearn for the simpler life.

She'd been musing over these thoughts for a long time in her cell in Stormcage when, one day, a very serendipitous letter arrived for her. An invitation. Coordinates.

It was time.

At the coordinates, on the right date, in the right country, River saw her parents, and the Doctor. Well, the Teselecta. Wearing another ridiculous hat. At least it wasn't a fez. Regardless, she did to it what she'd done to his fez, and shot it.

"Hello sweetie."

They all caught up at a nearby diner together. Even though this was before they knew who she was, it felt so good to be together as a family. River and the Doctor compared diaries to orient themselves.

"Right then, where are we? Have we done Easter Island yet?"

"Er, yes! I've got Easter Island."

"They worshipped you there. Have you seen the statues?"

"Jim the Fish."

"Oh! Jim the Fish. How is he?"

"Still building his dam."

"Sorry," interrupted Rory, "but what are you doing?"

"They're both time travellers, so they never meet in the right order. They're syncing their diaries. So, what's happening, then? Because you've been up to something."

"I've been running, faster than I've ever run. And I've been running my whole life. Now, it's time for me to stop. And tonight, I'm going to need you all with me."

"Okay. We're here. What's up?"

"A picnic. And then a trip. Somewhere different, somewhere brand new."

"Where?"

"Space, 1969."

Later that day, at the picnic by Lake Silencio, the Doctor toasted them.

“Salud!”

“Salud!”

“So, when are we going to 1969?”

“And since when you do drink wine?”

“I’m eleven-hundred-and-three, I must’ve drunk it sometime.” He took a swig from the bottle and promptly spat it back out. “Oh, why it’s horrid. I thought it would taste more like the gums.”

“Eleven-hundred-and-three? You were nine-hundred-and-eight the last time we saw you.”

“And you’ve put on a couple of pounds, I wasn’t going to mention it.”

“Who’s that?” asked Amy.

“Hm? Who’s who?”

“Sorry, what?”

“What did you see? You said you saw something.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Ah, the moon. Look at it. Of course, you lot did a lot more than look, didn’t you? Big silvery thing in the sky. You couldn’t resist it. Quite right.”

“The moon landing was in ‘69. Is that where we’re going?”

“No. A lot more happens in ‘69 than anyone remembers. Human beings. I thought I’d never get done saving you.”

A vehicle pulled up nearby, and an old man stepped out. The Doctor waved to him.

“Who’s he?”

“Oh my god,” said River, as if she didn’t recognise what was happening. As if she didn’t recognise herself, as as younger River in the spaceman - the spacesuit, she reminded herself, that’s what she should think of it as - emerged from the lake.

“You all need to stay back. Whatever happens now, you do not interfere. Clear?”

The Doctor went over to talk to her, the past her.

"That's an astronaut. That's an Apollo astronaut in a lake."

"Yeah."

The three of them watched the Doctor for a moment.

"What's he doing?"

The Doctor was shot.

"Doctor!"

"Amy, stay back! The Doctor said stay back! You have to stay back!"

"No! No! Doctor!"

Faux-regeneration energy started flowing from the Doctor's hands.

"I'm sorry," he said. Then he was shot again, and collapsed.

"No! Doctor!"

"Doctor, please!"

They ran over to him. River scanned him and, with a look to her mother, indicated that he was indeed exhibiting no signs of life.

"River. River! River? No."

River played her part and shot at her younger self. The bullets had no effect on the back of the spacesuit.

"Of course not."

"River, he can't be dead. This isn't possible."

"Whatever that was, it killed him in the middle of his regeneration cycle," River lied. "His body was already dead. He didn't make it to the next one."

"Maybe he's a clone or a duplicate or something."

The old man approached, carrying a can of petrol.

"I believe I can save you some time," he said. "That most certainly is the Doctor. And he is most certainly dead. He said you'd need this."

"Gasoline?"

"A Time Lord's body is a miracle. Even a dead one. There are whole empires out there who'd rip this world apart for just one cell. We can't leave him here. Or anywhere."

"Wake up. Come on, wake up, you stupid, bloody idiot. What do we do, Rory?"

"We're his friends. We do what the Doctor's friends always do - as we're told."

"There's a boat. If we're going to do this, let's do it properly."

And so they gave the Doctor a viking funeral as the sun set.

"Who are you?" River asked the old man. "Why did you come?"

"The same reason as you," he said, holding out his blue invitation. "Doctor Song, Amy, Rory. I'm Canton Everett Delaware the Third. I won't be seeing you again, but you'll be seeing me." With that, he left them.

"Four."

"Sorry, what?"

"The Doctor numbered the envelopes."

Back at the diner, they followed up on that train of thought.

"You got three, I was two, Mr. Delaware was four."

"So?"

"So, where's one?"

"What, you think he invited someone else?"

"Well, he must have. He planned all of this, to the last detail."

"Will you two shut up? It doesn't matter."

"He was up to something."

"He's dead."

"Space, 1969. What did he mean?"

"You're still talking, but it doesn't matter."

“Hey, it mattered to him.”

“So it matters to us.”

“He's dead.”

“But he still needs us. I know. Amy, I know. But right now we have to focus.”

“Look,” said her father, indicating to another blue envelope on a table near the of the diner. “Excuse me,” he asked the nearby busboy, “who was sitting over there?”

“Some guy.”

“The Doctor knew he was going to his death, so he sent out messages. When you know it's the end, who do you call?”

“Er, your friends. People you trust.”

“Number one. Who did The Doctor trust the most?”

That person came swaggering out of the restroom.

The Doctor.

“This is cold. Even by your standards, this is cold.”

“Or hello, as people used to say.”

“Doctor?”

“I just popped out to get my special straw. It adds more fizz.”

“You're okay. How can you be okay?”

“Hey, of course I'm okay. I'm always okay. I'm the King of Okay. Oh, that's a rubbish title. Forget that title. Rory the Roman! That's a good title. Hello, Rory. And Doctor River Song. Oh, you bad, bad girl. What trouble have you got for me this time?”

She slapped him, hard. Playing her part - and quietly enjoying it. How interesting it was to see him weave a complicated sequence of events over his timeline in a non-linear fashion, the way she'd become so accustomed to doing herself.

“Okay. I'm assuming that's for something I haven't done yet.”

“Yes, it is.”

“Good. Looking forward to it.”

“I don't understand. How can you be here?”

“I was invited. Date, map reference. Same as you lot, I assume, otherwise it's a hell of a coincidence.”

“River, what's going on?”

“Amy, ask him what age he is.”

“That's a bit personal.”

“Tell her. Tell her what age you are.”

“Nine-hundred-and-nine.”

“But you said you were-”

“So where does that leave us, huh? Jim the Fish? Have we done Jim the Fish yet?”

“Who's Jim the Fish?”

“I don't understand.”

“Yeah, you do.”

“I don't! What are we all doing here?”

“We've been recruited. Something to do with space, 1969, and a man called Canton Everett Delaware the Third.”

“Recruited by who?”

“Someone who trusts you more than anybody else in the universe.”

“And who's that?”

“Spoilers.”

In the TARDIS, the Doctor followed his new lead with glee.

“1969, that's an easy one! Funny, how some years are easy. Now, 1482, full of glitches. Now then, Canton Everett Delaware the Third. That was his name, yeah? How many of those can there be? Well, three, I suppose. Rory, is everybody cross with me for some reason?”

"I'll find out."

On the lower level beneath the TARDIS console, River and her parents talked in hushed tones, away from the Doctor.

"Explain it again."

"The Doctor we saw on the beach is a future version, two hundred years older than the one up there."

"But all that's still going to happen. He's still going to die."

"We're all going to do that, Amy."

"We're not all going to arrange our own wake and invite ourselves. So, the Doctor, in the future, knowing he's going to die, recruits his younger self and all of us to, to what, exactly? Avenge him?"

"Avenging's not his style."

"Save him."

"Yeah, that's not really his style either."

"We have to tell him."

"We've told him all we can. We can't even tell him we've seen his future self. He's interacted with his own past. It could rip a hole in the universe."

"Yes, but he's done it before."

"And in fairness, the universe did blow up."

"But he'd want to know."

"Would he? Would anyone?"

"I'm being extremely clever up here," the man of the hour called out, "and there's no one to stand around looking impressed! What's the point in having you all?"

"Couldn't you just slap him sometimes?"

"River, we can't just let him die. We have to stop it. How can you be okay with this?"

"The Doctor's death doesn't frighten me. Nor does my own. There's a far worse day coming for me."

Back on the main level of the TARDIS, the Doctor blathered on.

“Time isn't a straight line. It's all bumpy-wumpy. There's loads of boring stuff like Sundays and Tuesdays and Thursday afternoons. But now and then there are Saturdays. Big temporal tipping points when anything's possible. The TARDIS can't resist them, like a moth to a flame. She loves a party, so I give her 1969 and NASA, because that's space in the sixties, and Canton Everett Delaware the Third, and this is where she's pointing.”

“Washington D.C., April the eighth, 1969. So why haven't we landed?”

“Because that's not where we're going.”

“Oh. Where are we going?”

“Home. Well, you two are. Off you pop and make babies. And you, Doctor Song, back to prison. And me? I'm late for a biplane lesson in 1911. Or it could be knitting. Knitting or biplanes. One or the other. What? A mysterious summons. You think I'm just going to go? Who sent those messages? I know you know. I can see it in your faces. Don't play games with me. Don't ever, ever think you're capable of that.”

“You're going to have to trust us this time.”

“Trust you? Sure. But, first of all, Doctor Song, just one thing. Who are you? You're someone from my future. Getting that. But who? Okay. Why are you in prison? Who did you kill, hm? Now, I love a bad girl, me, but trust you? Seriously.”

“Trust me.”

“Okay.”

“You have to do this, and you can't ask why.”

“Are you being threatened? Is someone making you say that?”

“No.”

“You're lying.”

“I'm not lying.”

“Swear to me. Swear to me on something that matters.”

“Fish fingers and custard.”

"My life in your hands, Amelia Pond."

"Thank you."

"So! Canton Everett Delaware the Third. Who's he?"

River investigated.

"Ex FBI. Got kicked out."

"Why?"

"Six weeks after he left the Bureau, the President contacted him for a private meeting."

"Yeah, 1969. Who's President?"

"Richard Milhous Nixon. Vietnam. Watergate. There's some good stuff, too."

"Not enough."

"Hippie!"

"Archaeologist."

They journeyed to the Oval Office. River remembered talking to Nixon. Long, long ago.

"Okay, since I don't know what I'm getting into this time, for once I'm being discreet. I'm putting the engines on silent." He pulled a lever and the TARDIS wailed. River pulled a lever and the TARDIS quietened.

"Did you do something?"

"No, just watching."

"Putting the outer shield on invisible. I haven't done this in a while. Big drain on the power."

"You can turn the TARDIS invisible?" asked her father,

"Ha!" the Doctor laughed, performing the wrong manoeuvre.

"Very nearly," River clarified, moving another lever.

"Er, did you touch something?"

"Just admiring your skills, sweetie."

“Good. You might learn something. Okay. Now I can't check the scanner. It doesn't work when we're cloaked. Just give us a mo. Whoa! Whoa, whoa, whoa. You lot, wait a moment. We're in the middle of the most powerful city in the most powerful country on Earth. Let's take it slow.”

He stepped out of the TARDIS. River and her parents waited for what would come next, which came to be a loud bang.

“He said the scanner wouldn't work,” said her father, as she went over to operate it.

“I know,” she said, activating the scanner. “Bless.”

On the scanner, they could see the Doctor being wrestled to the ground by FBI agents.

“Lockdown! Lockdown!” they called.

“Stop that! Ahgr! Oh! River, have you got my scanner working yet?”

“Oh, I hate him.”

“No, you don't! River, make her blue again!”

She did. While the humans in the room grappled with that, the Doctor wrestled free and slid into Nixon's chair.

“Mr. President, that child just told you everything you need to know, but you weren't listening. Never mind, though, because the answer's yes. I'll take the case. Fellows, the guns, really? I just walked into the highest security office in the United States and parked a big blue box on the rug. Do you think you can just shoot me?”

“They're Americans!” River reminded him.

“Don't shoot. Definitely no shooting.”

“Nobody shoot us either. Very much not in need of getting shot. Look, we've got our hands up.”

“Who the hell are you?”

“Sir, you need to stay back.”

“But who are they and what is that box?”

"It's a police box. Can't you read? I'm your new undercover agent on loan from Scotland Yard. Code name the Doctor. These are my top operatives, the Legs, the Nose, and Mrs Robinson."

"I hate you."

"No, you don't."

"Who are you?"

"Nah, boring question. Who's phoning you? That's interesting. Because Canton Three is right. That was definitely a girl's voice, which means there's only one place in America she can be phoning from."

"Where?"

"Do not engage with the intruder, Mister Delaware," said an FBI agent.

"You heard everything I heard. It's simple enough. Give me five minutes, I'll explain. On the other hand, lay a finger on me or my friends, and you'll never, ever know."

"How did you get it in here? I mean, you didn't carry it in."

"Clever, eh?"

"Love it."

"Do not compliment the intruder."

"Five minutes?"

"Five."

"Mr. President, that man is a clear and present danger to-

"Mr. President, that man walked in here with a big blue box and three of his friends, and that's the man he walked past. One of them's worth listening to. I say we give him five minutes. See if he delivers."

"Thanks, Canton."

"If he doesn't, I'll shoot him myself."

"Not so thanks."

"Sir, I cannot recommend-

“Shut up, Peterson! All right, five minutes.”

“I'm going to need a SWAT team, ready to mobilise. Street level maps covering all of Florida. A pot of coffee, twelve jammie dodgers and a fez.”

“Get him his maps.”

A little while later, the man they'd recognised as the young Canton talked with the Doctor. It was surreal for River to hear them discuss her telephone conversations she'd had with Nixon lifetimes ago.

“Why Florida?”

“There's where NASA is. She mentioned a spaceman. NASA's where the spacemen live. Also, there's another lead I'm following.”

“A spaceman, like the one we saw at the lake.”

“Maybe. Probably.”

“I remember,” said her mother, apropos of nothing.

“Amy? What do you remember?”

“I don't know. I just...”

“Amy, what's wrong?”

“Amy?”

“Are you alright?”

“Yeah. No, I'm fine. I'm just feeling a little sick. Excuse me, is there a toilet or something?”

“Sorry, ma'am, while this procedure's ongoing, you must remain within the Oval office.”

“Shut up and take her to the restroom.”

“This way, ma'am.”

“Thanks.”

Conversations continued for a while. Eventually, the young Melody Pond phoned Nixon again.

“The kid?” asked Canton, as the phone rang.

“Should I answer it?” asked the President.

“Here!” exclaimed the Doctor, brandishing a map. “The only place in the United States that call could be coming from. See? Obvious, when you think about it.”

Her mother returned to the room.

“You, sir,” said Canton, “are a genius.”

“It’s a hobby.”

“Mr. President, answer the phone.”

“Hello. This is President Nixon.”

“It’s here,” said River, lifetimes ago, “the spaceman’s here! It’s going to get me! It’s going to eat me!”

“There’s no time for a SWAT team. Let’s go. Mr. President, tell her help’s on the way. Canton, on no account follow me into this box and close the door behind you.”

“What the hell are you doing?”

They all ran into the TARDIS together, and the Doctor dematerialised it away.

“Jefferson isn’t a girl’s name,” the Doctor explained on board. “It isn’t her name either. Jefferson, Adams, Hamilton. River.”

“Surnames of three of America’s founding fathers.”

“Lovely fellows. Two of them fancied me.”

“Are you okay?” her father asked Canton. “Coping?”

“You see,” the Doctor continued, “the President asked the child two questions. Where are you and who are you? She was answering where.”

“It’s bigger on the inside.”

“Yeah, you get used to it.”

“Now, where would you find three big, historical names in a row like that?”

“Where?”

"Here. Come on"

"It's..."

"Are you taking care of this?" her mother asked her father, indicating to Canton.

"Why is it always my turn?"

"Because you're the newest."

They arrived at a dingy, cluttered warehouse.

"Where are we?"

"About five miles from Cape Kennedy Space Centre. It's 1969, the year of the moon. Interesting, don't you think?"

"But why would a little girl be here?"

"I don't know. Lost me a bit. The President asked the girl where she was, and she did what any lost little girl would do. She looked out of the window.:

"Streets. Of course, street names."

"The only place in Florida, probably all of America, with those three street names on the same junction. And Doctor Song, you've got that face on again.:

"What face?:

"The 'he's hot when he's clever' face."

"This is my normal face."

"Yes, it is."

"Oh, shut up."

"Not a chance."

Her father emerged from the TARDIS with Canton.

"We've moved. How, how can we have moved?"

"You haven't even got to space travel yet?"

"I was going to cover it with time travel."

"Time travel..."

"Brave heart, Canton. Come on."

"So we're in a box that's bigger on the inside, and it travels through time and space.:

"Yeah, basically."

"How long have Scotland Yard had this?"

They proceeded to explore the warehouse together.

It's a warehouse of some kind. Disused."

You realise this is almost certainly a trap, of course?"

"I noticed the phone, yes.:

"What about it?:

"It was cut off. So how did the child phone from here?"

"Okay, but why would anyone want to trap us?"

"Let's see if anyone tries to kill us and work backwards."

"Now, why would a little girl be here?"

"I don't know. Let's find her and ask her."

They came across some anachronistic technology strewn about.

"It's nonterrestrial. Definitely alien. Probably not even from this time zone."

"Which is odd, because look at this!"

The Doctor indicated a crate full of spacesuits.

"It's earth tech. It's contemporary."

"It's very contemporary. Cutting edge. This is from the space program."

"Stolen?"

"What, by aliens?"

"Apparently."

"But why? I mean, if you can make it all the way to Earth, why steal technology that can barely make it to the moon?"

"Maybe because it's cooler? Look how cool this stuff is."

"Cool aliens?"

"Well, what would you call me?"

"An alien."

"Oi!"

"I, er, I think he's okay now."

"Ah! Back with us, Canton."

"I like your wheels."

"That's my boy. So, come on. Little girl. Let's find her."

As the boys went off, River and her mother examined the alien technology together.

"River."

"I know what you're thinking."

"No, you don't."

"You're thinking if we can find the spaceman in 1969 and neutralise it, then it won't be around in 2011 to kill the Doctor."

"Okay, lucky guess."

"It's only because I was thinking it too."

"So let's do it."

"It doesn't work like that. We came here because of what we saw in the future. If we try and prevent the future from happening, we create a paradox."

"Time can be rewritten."

"Not all of it."

"Says who?"

"Who do you think? What's this?"

They looked at what appeared to be a manhole cover.

"We can still save him."

"Doctor?" River said as he rejoined them "Look at this."

"So where does that go?"

"There's a network of tunnels running under here."

"Life signs?"

"No, nothing that's showing up."

"Those are the worst kind."

River began making her way down the manhole.

"Be careful."

"Careful? I tried that once. Ever so dull."

"Shout if you get in trouble."

"Don't worry, I'm quite the screamer. Now there's a spoiler for you."

Down below, River discovered power lines, and the monsters from her youth. Silents. She retreated, then promptly forgot them.

"All clear. Just tunnels. Nothing down there I can see. Er, give me five minutes. I want to take another look around."

"Stupidly dangerous!"

"Yeah, I like it too. Amy, look after him."

She went back down, soon joined by her father.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

"Ah. Yes, yes. I just felt a bit sick. It's the prison food, probably. Okay, this way? What do you think?"

"I keep thinking I hear things."

"That's interesting. These tunnels are old. Really old. How can they be really old and nobody notice them?"

They came across a metal door.

"It's a maintenance hatch."

"It's locked. Oh, why do people always lock things?"

"What's through there?"

"I've no idea."

"Something bad?"

"Almost definitely."

"You're going to open it, aren't you?"

"Well, it's locked. How's a girl supposed to resist?"

"Is this sensible?"

"God, I hope not."

"Oh, you and the Doctor. I can kind of picture it."

"Keep a lookout."

"What did you mean? What you said to Amy. There's a worst day coming for you."

"When I first met the Doctor, a long, long time ago, he knew all about me. Think about that. An impressionable young girl and, suddenly this man just drops out of the sky and he's clever and mad and wonderful, and knows every last thing about her. Imagine what that does to a girl."

"I don't really have to."

"The trouble is," River explained, as she worked away at opening the hatch, "it's all back to front. My past is his future. We're travelling in opposite directions. Every time we meet, I know him more, he knows me less. I live for the days when I see him, but I know that every time I do, he'll be one step further away. And the day is coming when I'll look into that man's eyes, my Doctor, and he won't have the faintest idea who I am. And I think it's going to kill me."

They made their way into some sort of chamber. Vapour wafted across the floor. Machinery hummed on the walls. Some sort of ship?

“What is this place?”

“That's an alarm. Check if anything's coming.”

He checked

“There's nothing out there.”

“These tunnels, they're not just here, they're everywhere. They're running under the surface of the entire planet. They've been here for centuries.”

The lights began to flicker insistently.

“Rory!”

She heard sounds of a great commotion, of gunshots, of what she remembered now as her mother shooting her.

DAY OF THE MOON

River scrambled to rejoin the others up above.

“Run!”

“What the hell's going on?” asked Canton.

“Look behind you.”

“There's nothing behind me.”

“Look. Look. Canton, look, I tell you.”

He turned around. So did she. They saw. And then they didn't see. They heard, then they didn't hear.

Silence.

Over the next few months, they tried to track the Silents, to gain and retain knowledge of them. River played her part, as it certainly helped her in her ongoing attempt to understand the religion and the creatures so tangled up in her life. Her knowing how this all ended (or, rather, began), with the Teselecta by the lake, didn't matter as much as she might've expected - time could be rewritten after all, and when swept up by an adventure she was hardly the type to revel in spoilers.

They - River, the Doctor, her parents, Canton - organised a feint. They needed to know how badly they had infiltrated the country, but had to investigate in such a way that the Silents were kept in the dark about it.

They'd learned to leave tally marks on their bodies to indicate when they'd seen a Silent. Even without direct memory, they could leave clues, and build understanding out of the hole that lack of memory would leave.

Canton was the key. The four of them would be declared as spies. Canton would take the Doctor in (where he would keep the TARDIS set invisible in the dark story alloy prison cube Canton knew would be built around him in Area 51), and they the family trio would split up as fugitives, spreading out across the country to find whatever information they could. When the time came, Canton would hunt them down. Then, back they'd go, not quite to the grave as Canton would present it, but to the TARDIS, after such a time where the prison cube was completed around the Doctor and he could materialise the TARDIS away with all the authority outside none the wiser.

Eventually, River had found all she could, and it was time for her to be taken in as well. She'd been tracking Silents in a New York skyscraper.

"I see you," she said, tallying two more Silents on her arm. "I see you."

"Doctor Song?" called out Canton. "Doctor Song? Go! Go! Go!"

His men caught up with her at an open wall.

"Don't move! It's over."

"They're here, Canton. They're everywhere."

"I know. America's being invaded."

"You were invaded a long time ago - America is occupied."

"You're coming with us, Doctor Song. There's no way out this time."

"There's always a way out."

She fell backward out of the building, and fell into the sideways TARDIS, plummeting into the pool.

Some time after regrouping with the rest of them in the TARDIS, they made their way to the Kennedy Space Centre, where the now-bearded Doctor assured them he had a secret weapon of sorts.

“Apollo 11’s your secret weapon?”

“No, no. It’s not Apollo 11. That would be silly. It’s Neil Armstrong’s foot.”

Regrouping in the TARDIS, the Doctor began injecting something into everyone’s hands.

“Ow!” said Canton.

“Ha. So, three months. What have we found out?”

“Well, they are everywhere. Every state in America. Ah!”

“Not just America, the entire world.”

“There’s a greater concentration here, though.”

“Ow!”

“Are you okay?”

“All better.”

“Better?”

“Turns out I was wrong. I’m not pregnant.”

River’s ears perked up.

“What’s up?”

“Nothing. Really, nothing. Seriously.”

“So, you’ve seen them, but you don’t remember them.”

“You’ve seen them too. That night at the warehouse, remember? While you were pretending to hunt us down, we saw hundreds of those things. We still don’t know what they look like.”

“It’s like they edit themselves out of your memory as soon as you look away. The exact second you’re not looking at them, you can’t remember anything.”

“Sometimes you feel a bit sick, though. But not always.”

“So that’s why you marked your skin.”

“Only way we’d know if we’d had an encounter.”

“How long have they been here?”

“That’s what we’ve spent the last three months trying to find out.”

“Not easy, if you can’t remember anything you discover.”

“How long do you think?”

“As long as there’s been something in the corner of your eye, or creaking in your house, or breathing under your bed, or voices through a wall. They’ve been running your lives for a very long time now, so keep this straight in your head. We are not fighting an alien invasion; we’re leading a revolution. And today, the battle begins.”

“How?”

“Like this.”

He injected River.

“Ow!”

“Nanorecorder. Fuses with the cartilage in your hand.” He injected himself. “Ow. And it tunes directly to the speech centres in your brain. It’ll pick up your voice, no matter what. Telepathic connection. So, the moment you see one of the creatures, you activate it, and describe aloud exactly what you’re seeing. Because the moment you break contact, you’re going to forget it happened. The light will flash if you’ve left yourself a message. You keep checking your hand if you’ve had an encounter. That’s the first you’ll know about it.”

“Why didn’t you tell me this before we started?”

“I did, but even information about these creatures erases itself over time. I couldn’t refresh it because I couldn’t talk to you.”

A Silent seemed to appear in front of Canton.

“My god, ow did it get in here?”

“Keep eye contact with the creature, and when I say, turn back, and when you do, straighten my bowtie.”

The apparent Silent disappeared. Then Canton looked away, then turned back and adjusted the Doctor’s bowtie.

“What? What are you staring at?”

“Look at your hand.”

The image of the Silent reappeared.

“It’s a hologram, extrapolated from the photo on Amy’s phone. Take a good, long look.” He turned off the image. “You just saw an image of one of the creatures we’re fighting. Describe it to me.”

“I can’t.”

“No. Neither can I. You straightened my bowtie because I planted the idea in your head while you were looking at the creature.”

“So they could do that to people. You could be doing stuff and not really knowing why you’re doing it.”

“Like post-hypnotic suggestion.”

“Ruling the world with post-hypnotic suggestion?”

“Now then, a little girl in a spacesuit. They got the suit from NASA, but where did they get the girl?”

“It could be anywhere.”

“Except they’d probably stay close to that warehouse, because why bother doing anything else? And they’d take her from somewhere that would cause the least amount of attention. But you’ll have to find her. I’m off to NASA.”

“Find her? Where do we look?”

“Children’s homes.”

Her mother and Canton went off to follow that lead, and River and her father went to brief the President. When the Doctor indicated it was time, they took the President to NASA, where the Doctor enacting his plan.

“Hello,” said the President to one of two men talking with the Doctor inside a lecture hall.

“I believe it’s Mr. Gardner. Is that correct? Head of Security?”

“Er, yes sir. Yes, Mr. President.”

“Mr. Grant, is it?”

“Yes, Mr. President.”

"The hopes and dreams of millions of Americans stand here today at Cape Kennedy, and you're the men who guard those dreams. On behalf of the American people, I thank you."

"You're welcome, Mr. President."

"I understand that you have a baby on the way, Mr. Grant."

"Yes, Mr. President."

"What are you hoping for, a boy or a girl?"

"Just a healthy American, sir."

"A healthy American will do just nicely. Now, fellows, listen. This man here, code name 'the Doctor', is doing some work for me personally. Could you cut him a little slack."

"Er, Mr. President...he did break into Apollo 11."

The Doctor mouthed 'sorry'.

"Well, I'm sure he had a very good reason for that. But I need you to release him so he can get on with some very important work for the American people. Could you do that for me?"

"Well..."

"Son, I am your Commander in Chief."

"Then I guess that would be fine, Mr. President."

"Glad to hear it."

"Thank you," said the Doctor, "bye bye."

"Carry on, gentlemen."

"Ahem," said her father as he broke the Lunar Module Eagle model he'd been examining. "America salutes you."

Back at the Oval Office River talked to Canton via the TARDIS phone while the Doctor offered the President some advice. She popped outside of the TARDIS to bring the Doctor up to speed.

"Doctor, it's Canton. Quick, he needs us."

And so River came to Greystark Orphanage for yet another time in her lives.

"Where is she Doctor?" asked her father, unknowingly referring to his daughter as he examined the empty spacesuit lying on the floor of what had once been her bedroom.

"It's empty," River offered.

"It's dark," came a voice from the floor. Amy's nanorecorder. "So dark. I don't know where I am. Please, can anybody hear me?"

"They took this out of her. How did they do that, Doctor? Why can I still hear her?"

"Is it a recording?"

"Er, it defaults to live. This is current. Wherever she is right now, this is what she's saying."

"Amy, can you hear me? We're coming for you. Wherever you are, we're coming, I swear."

"She can't hear you. I'm so sorry. It's one-way."

"She can always hear me, Doctor. Always, wherever she is, and she always knows that I am coming for her. Do you understand me? Always."

"Doctor, are you out there? Can you hear me? Doctor? Oh, god. Please, please, Doctor, just get me out of this."

"He's coming. I'll bring him, I swear."

"Hello?" called out Dr. Renfrew, the director of the orphanage. "Is somebody there? I think someone has been shot. I think we should help. We...I can't....I can't remember."

They proceeded to his office, where a wounded Silent clung onto life.

"Okay. Who are what are you?"

"Silence, Doctor. We are the Silence. And Silence will fall."

Later, at the warehouse, River, her father, and the Doctor examined the spacesuit she'd now both shot at and shot in. She feigned her knowledge about it as stemming from examining it now, rather than having lived in it already.

"It's an exoskeleton. Basically life support. There's about twenty different kinds of alien tech in here."

“Who was she? Why put her in here?”

“You put this on, you don’t even need to eat. The suit processes sunlight directly. It’s got built-in weaponry and a communications system that can hack into anything.”

“Including the telephone network?”

“Easily.”

“But why phone the President?”

“It defaults to the highest authority it can find. The little girl gets frightened, the most powerful man on Earth gets a phone call. The night terrors with a hotline to the White House. You won’t learn anything from that envelope you know...”

“Purchased on Earth. Perfectly ordinary stationery. TARDIS blue. Summoned by a stranger who won’t even show his face. That’s a first for me. How about you?”

“Our lives are back to front. Your future’s my past. Your firsts are my lasts.”

“That’s not really what I asked.”

“Ask something else then.”

“What are the Silence doing, raising a child?”

“Keeping her safe, even giving her independence.”

“The only way to save Amy is to work out what the Silence are doing.”

“I know.”

“And every single thing we learn about them brings us a step closer.”

“Yeah, Doctor, I get it. I know.”

“Of course, it’s possible she’s not just any little girl.”

“Well, I’d say she’s human, going by the life support software.”

“But?”

“She climbed out of this suit. Like, she forced her way out. She must be incredibly strong.”

“Incredibly strong and running away. I like her.”

"We should be trying to find her."

"Yes, I know. But how? Anyway, I have the strangest feeling she's going to find us."

"Apollo 11, this is Houston," blared the nearby television. "How do you read? Over."

"Why does it look like a NASA spacesuit?"

"Because that's what the Silence do. Think about it. They don't make anything themselves. They don't have to. They get other life forms to do it for them."

"So they're parasites then."

"Superparasites, standing in the shadows of human history since the very beginning. We know they can influence human behaviour any way they want. If they've been doing that on a global scale for thousands of years..."

It was a bizarrely byzantine plan. Why take so long? Why act in such a roundabout manner? Since they were from a technologically-advanced religion from the far future, why not just bring back some kind of advanced weapon to kill the Doctor at Lake Silencio, instead of all this manipulation? River knew there was still much she didn't understand about the situation, but more and more she realised how rooted in religion this all was. The utterances like scripture - 'Silence will fall'. The rhymes from when she was a child. Her memories were so cloudy, little beyond Kovarian, rhymes, and vague platitudes came to her, and the harder she focused, the more they seemed to slip away.

River figured the Silence's apparent stranglehold on human history as faux-domination, for how effective was it really? When the Silence took millennia to get humans to build something they'd inevitably have gotten to building anyway, when it was so infested with technology from other species and other times already, surely it was born more from spite and zealotry than any actual mastermind of utter domineering force? Spite, for both River herself and humanity at large, and zealotry for putting whatever their elusive ideals were into practice. They seemed deluded, but how much power those religious delusions had if it empowered them to acts such as these...

"Then what?" asked her father.

"Then why did the human race suddenly decide to go to the Moon?"

"Ten, nine, ignition sequence start, six, five four..."

"Because the Silence needed a spacesuit."

“One, zero. All engines running. Lift-off. We have a lift-off. Thirty-two minutes past the hour, lift-off on Apollo 11.”

River’s receiver beeped as a video file reached it.

“You should kill us all on sight,” seethed a Silent on-screen, now in captivity with Canton instead of at the orphanage.

“Help me, Doctor,” came her mother’s voice from far away.

Nearby, a glove of the spacesuit twitched.

“This suit, it seems to be repairing itself. How’s it doing that? Doctor, a unit like this, would it ever be able to move without an occupant?”

“Why?”

“Well, the little girl said the spaceman was coming to eat her. Maybe that’s exactly what happened.”

“I love you,” came her mother’s voice again. “I know you think it’s him. I know you think it ought to be him, but it’s not. It’s you. And when I see you again, I’m going to tell you properly, just to see your stupid face. My life was so boring before you just dropped out of the sky. So just get your stupid face where I can see it, okay? Okay?”

River pointedly didn’t look at her father, having to hear that.

“She’ll be safe for now. No point in a dead hostage.”

“Can’t you save her?”

“I can track that signal back. Take us right to her.”

“Then why haven’t you?”

“Because then what? I find her, and then what do I do? This isn’t an alien invasion. They live here. This is their empire. This is kicking the Romans out of Rome.”

“Rome fell.”

“I know. I was there.”

“So was I.”

“Personal question...”

“Seriously, you?”

“Do you ever remember it? Two-thousand years, waiting for Amy? The Last Centurion...”

“No.”

“You’re lying.”

“Of course I’m lying.”

“Of course you are. Not the sort of thing anyone forgets.”

“But I don’t remember it all the time. It’s like this door in my head. I can keep it shut.”

“Please,” came her mother’s voice again, “please, just come and get me. Come and get me.”

“The Flight Controller’s going to go for landing,” blared the television. “Just give days since Apollo 11 blasted from Cape Kennedy, this unprecedented journey is reaching its crucial moment. Armstrong and Aldrin are making their descent to the surface of the Moon.”

“We copy you on the ground. You got a bunch of guys about to go blue.”

After the final pieces of the Doctor’s plan were put into play, they took the TARDIS to where her mother was being held.

“Oh, interesting,” said the Doctor upon exiting the TARDIS and seeing the multitude of Silents that awaited him outside. “Very Aickman Road. I’ve seen one of these before. Abandoned. I wonder how that happened? Oh, well I suppose I’m about to find out. Rory, River, keep one Silent in eyeshot at all times. Oh, hello. Sorry, you were in the middle of something. I just had to say, though, have you seen what’s on the telly? Oh, hello, Amy. Are you all right? Want to watch some television? Ah. Now, stay where you are. Because look at me, I’m confident. You want to watch that, me, when I’m confident. Oh, and this is my friend River. Nice hair, clever, has her own gun, and unlike me, she really doesn’t mind shooting people. I shouldn’t like that. Kind of do, a bit.”

“Thank you sweetie.”

“I know you’re team players and everything, but she’ll definitely kill at least the first three of you.”

“Well, the first seven, easily.”

“Seven? Really?”

“Oh, eight for you honey.”

“Stop it.”

“Make me.”

“Yeah? Well, maybe I will.”

“Is this really important, flirting?” asked her restrained mother. “Because I feel like I should be higher on the list right now.”

“Yes, right, sorry, As I was saying, my naughty friend here is going to kill the first three of you to attack, plus him behind, so maybe you want to draw lots, or have a quiz.”

“What’s he got?” her mother asked her father as he worked on freeing her.

“Something, I hope.”

“Or maybe you could just listen a minute. Because all I really want to do is accept your total surrender and then I’ll let you go in peace. Yes, you’ve been interfering in human history for thousands of years. Yes, people have suffered and died, but what’s the point in two hearts, if you can’t be a bit forgiving, now and then? Ooh, ‘the Silence’ - you guys take that seriously, don’t you? Okay, you got me. I’m lying. I’m not really going to let you go that easily. Nice thought, but it’s not Christmas. First, you tell me about the girl. Who is she? Why is she important? What’s she for?”

“And we’re getting a picture on the TV,” the broadcast continued.

“Guys, sorry, but you’re way out of time. Now, come on. A bit of history for you. Aren’t you proud? Because you helped. Now, do you know how many people are watching this live on the telly? Half a billion. And that’s nothing, because the human race will spread out among the stars. You just watch them fly. Billions and billions of them, for billions and billions of years, and every single one of them at some point in their lives, will look back at this man, taking that very first step, and they will never, ever forget it.”

“Okay, engine stop,” continued the voices from the TV. “ATA on the descent. Modes control both auto. Descent engine command off.”

“Oh,” said the Doctor, pulling out his phone, “but don’t forget this bit. Ready?”

“That’s one small step for man-” said Neil Armstrong.

“You should kill us all on sight,” interrupted the recording of a Silent.

“-and one giant leap for mankind.”

“And one whacking great kick up the backside for the Silence. You just raised an army against yourself and now, for a thousand generations, you're going to be ordering them to destroy you every day. How fast can you run? Because today's the day the human race throw you off their planet. They won't even know they're doing it. I think, quite possibly, the word you're looking for right now is - oops. Run! Guys, I mean us. Run.”

The Silents were swelling up with electrical force. River began to shoot at them.

“I can't get her out!” said her father, struggling with her mother's bonds.

“Go. Go.”

“We are not leaving without you.”

“Look, will you just get your stupid face out of here.”

“Run!” River interrupted. “Into the TARDIS, quickly.”

The Doctor managed to get her mother free, and they made their way to the TARDIS.

“Don't let them build to full power.”

“I know. There's a reason why I'm shooting, honey. What are you doing?”

“Helping.”

“You've got a screwdriver. Go build a cabinet.”

“That's really rude.”

“Learn how to drive.”

He entered the TARDIS. She span around, dealing killing blows to the remaining Silents. When she'd finished, she noticed her father gaping at her from the TARDIS doorway.

“My old fellah didn't see that, did he? He gets ever so cross...”

“So...what kind of doctor are you?”

She shot a Silent clinging to life behind her.

“Archaeology. Love a tomb.”

“You can let me fly it,” said the Doctor once they were all inside.

“Yeah, or we could go where we’re supposed to.”

“What’s the matter with you?” her mother asked her father.

“You called me stupid.”

“I always call you stupid.”

“No, but my face.” He showed her the discarded nanorecorder. “I wasn’t sure who you were talking about. You know, me or-”

“Him?”

“Well, you did say dropped out of the sky.”

“It’s a figure of speech, moron,” she said, before kissing him.

“Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.”

After tying a few loose ends with the President, and bidding Canton goodbye (for a few decades at least), the Doctor returned River to Stormcage.

“You could come with us.”

“I escape often enough, thank you. And I have a promise to live up to. You’ll understand soon enough.”

The Doctor looked confused when she mentioned that promise. One day he’d understand - one day he did understand, and made her understand in turn, she’d lived it already after all. He had heard her, in the end, when she’d lambasted him for being so careless with the vast influence he’d been having on the universe.

The word ‘doctor’ coming to mean something drastically different in worlds he’d walked in, that had properly shaken him. A religious sect going to such bizarre lengths to address the apparent danger of him, it wasn’t something he ignored forever.

He had - he would - come to think it was best to step back into the shadows, so to speak, more mindful of exactly what sort of an impact he’d been having on the universe.

And what point would the fake death he ended up playing to that end be, if not legitimised by her spending time for committing it?

In a way, her serving time in Stormcage was a testament to their understanding of each other. Her relationship with him, as well as her work in its own right, had led her to understand the issues the way he carelessly conducted himself increasingly dramatically throughout the universe was coming to be a bad thing. His respect for her, and self-awareness about how much he'd begun to flex his reputation more and more and how that had come to affect how he was perceived (they'd both hardly forgotten the Alliance that had masterminded the Pandorica), that played into it as well. He might not understand now, but he did, and he would, and that was the promise she was living up to.

That's what she told herself, at least. She suspected part of it was her wanting to perform penance for the crimes (both remembered and forgotten) of her youth too, but couching it in religious terms discomfited her.

"Okay," said the Doctor, shaking her out of that line of thought, "up to you. See you next time. Call me."

"What, that's it? What's the matter with you?"

"Have I forgotten something?"

"Oh, shut up."

She kissed him.

"Right. Okay. Interesting."

"What's wrong? You're acting like we've never done that before."

"We haven't."

"We haven't?"

"Oh, look at the time. Must be off. But it was very nice. It was, it was good. It was, er, unexpected. You know what they say. There's a first time for everything."

He went back into the TARDIS, and left.

"And a last time."

That did unsettle her. It wasn't like their timelines were utterly back-to-front; there was hardly any godly force of fate that could enforce such a poetic curse upon them. But there was something of a pattern, an imbalance, certainly.

She dwelt on that.

Alone.

OH YES

River zapped away from prison with her vortex manipulator, planning to drop into some adventure to shake herself out of the stupor her regressing relationship with the Doctor had put her in.

She wondered if, given how backwards their relationship seemed to be going, it made sense to push that, and go farther back she'd ever gone before and finally seek out another Doctor.

Would he recognise her? She dreaded that moment he first met her. She remembered meeting him for the first time, as Mels. What would it be like from his end? Would he have another face as well? She hoped so. The more faces she'd known, the longer their relationship had been. Would be.

How well would another Doctor know her? Would much were the different Doctors the same man? Would another Doctor know how much she loved mythology, how the tales of the Furies were one of the few things from her tortured childhood she hung onto? Would he know how much she'd loved the Norse conception of Valkyries as well? She decided to put it to the test. There were two planets humans would come to call Asgard.

One was a planet-sized theme park that saw many visitors.

The other had a landscape so similar to the conception of its Norse namesake, all the way down to a humongous tree at the centre so similar to how the Norse had thought of Yggdrasil, the tree of life. Religious issues ended up seeing humans barred from entry to the planet, which had no surviving indigenous lifeforms. Massive ships circled above the planet in this prolonged stalemate.

One particularly tense incident between the religious groups fighting over who had the right to the planet saw some sort of weapon was deployed to tarnish Yggdrasil. Photo records from the relative future showed it was a Doctor that resolved the incident and saved Yggdrasil from destruction...but it wasn't her Doctor. This Doctor looked dashing and roguish where her Doctor looked smashing and impish.

River wasn't technically a human, so she felt well within her rights to zap herself down onto the planet to get into this incident for herself and meet another Doctor.

Arriving on the planet's surface, she gawped at what she saw.

A monstrous serpentine creature was literally biting Yggdrasil and tearing great big chunks of the tree out. It had six eyes on the end of long stalks, huge fans encased in sneering mouths, and a scaly, segmented body with smatterings of ugly hair along the neck.

Down below it was a man, the Doctor, fiddling with some sort of gizmo as heroically as it was possible to fiddle a gizmo, while standing in a classic power stance.

"Oh yes," he exclaimed, "you drashig, well, you are basically just an animal aren't you, but the humans that sent you down here, to profane something so beautiful...I wouldn't kill you, and I wouldn't kill them. But I am the Doctor, and I prescribe them a taste of their own medicine."

With that, he waved his sonic over his gizmo, and the creature - the drashig - lit up and was swirled away in what surely must have been some form of teleportation ray.

"Doctor," she called out.

He did a double take as he recognised her.

"River? What? What?"

"Doctor, that drashig, where did you teleport it?"

His eyes, wide with surprise, narrowed as his face hardened. "You see those ships on there? Big enough, from all they've sucked dry out of the people they manipulate? Well, they're big enough to fit a drashig, wouldn't you say?"

"Doctor! It'll die up there!"

"Not by my hand."

"Not the people, Doctor, the drashig!"

His expression slipped.

"You hadn't even thought of that," she said, shocked. "Doctor, your gizmo, can you beam it somewhere else remotely?"

"Well, no, it has to be close-range..."

“Give me that,” she said, snatching it out of his hands. She looked up at the ships so far above. “How does this work? Does the sonic operate it? And which ship, Doctor?”

He meekly pointed to one of the ships in the sky while she snatched the sonic screwdriver out of his hands as well. She eyed the ship off. Then, with a few taps of her vortex manipulator, she materialised onboard.

The drashig was screaming in pain, thrashing about onboard. It fit in the crudest, most literal of ways the Doctor meant it, but was woefully constricted, thrashing around. Viscera surrounded it, bodies of those it’d killed in her panic and rage.

River scanned her mind for a planet, any planet that might be suitable for it. Praying it would work, she thought of a nearby marshy planet lacking intelligent lifeforms at this period of history. She quickly tried to recall the controls for how to use the sonic she remembered from her Doctor, and activated the gizmo while directing it at the drashig.

It vanished with the same teleportation effect it’d exhibited below. River beamed herself back down onto Asgard, not wanting to take in anymore of the ship’s contents, one way or another..

The Doctor was slumped against Yggdrasil. He looked up as she approached.

“River...I’m sorry. I’m so, so sorry. I didn’t think.”

“It’s okay, hush, it’s okay.” She scooted over next to him. “I was just...surprised to see you so flippant about a creature like that.”

“Well, they are one of the most dangerous predators in the universe. I daresay they aren’t used to anyone interested in their welfare. Where did you send her, by the way?”

She told him.

“Ah. Good choice. Marshy. Just the perfect spot for Marcia.”

“Marcia?”

“Marcia the Marshy Drashig.”

She laughed in spite of herself. She was shocked, and delighted, at how natural this was feeling so soon. Maybe it was because this clearly wasn’t their first meeting for him.

She took out her diary and compared it with his. He was a bit furtive about his. Perhaps to distract her, he started making plans for a date, a picnic underneath the tree.

“Doctor, have you been alone for long? No companion? I’m not complaining, but you certainly seem very eager...”

“Well, yes.”

As they walked to the TARDIS - and what a different TARDIS it was inside, so moody, so grunge - for picnic supplies, he filled her in on his current circumstances while being as vague as possible. She read between the lines and figured he had scared himself with how either how ruthless or how arrogant he’d gotten in a recent adventure, was shaken by some sort of prophecy about his future, and was distracting himself by plunging himself into adventure after adventure without anytime to really stop and think. No wonder he’d acted oddly with the drashig.

Eventually, they’d sorted out their supplies, found a lovely spot under Yggdrasil, and had a lovely picnic together. The wine was particularly delightful.

“River, how many other...faces of mine have you met?”

“Spoilers.”

“No, really, I’m serious, I need to know.”

“Well,” she said, eyeing him off and seeing he really was quite serious and quite concerned, “I do have photos...”

“Photos?” he yelped.

She showed him the photos of multiple faces she’d identified as the Doctor through her research, archaeological and otherwise. He retrieved a pen from his coat and began to cross out the faces of nine of them.

“Oh, I hate you,” River said as he scribbled over the photos.

“I know. Look, River, these faces, you cannot meet these. They can’t remember you.”

“Spoilers indeed...so it’s either your face, or,” she pointed to her boyish Doctor’s face amongst the photos, “his that meets me for the first time?”

He looked down. River wasn’t sure if he was the one to regenerate into her other Doctor, or he was the one to regenerate into this Doctor before her now. She dearly, dearly hoped her first meeting with whichever one came first was a long, way away for her. But, she supposed, even if it wasn’t, if her diary still had many pages left, perhaps it wouldn’t be too worrying...the diary was only for their meetings, after all, and the Doctor

was the type of person to know how many pages to bind - and she still had many, many pages left.

“Oh, sweetie, you’re thinking so small. I can still meet these faces.”

“No, no, you really can’t. River, time-”

“As long as I erase their memory afterwards.”

“Well,” he said, puzzling over that. “Well, actually...oh, that’s rather good.”

“Thank you.”

“Or disguise myself.”

“Er, not sure that’s quite as good of an idea.”

“As long as these faces don’t recognise or remember me, I’m in the clear, yes? Sweetie? You’re looking ever so pale.”

“Just...thinking over some past encounters. River...you’re brilliant.”

After that they talked about nothing in particular, relaxing with each other and exchanging light, flirty banter. He was more directly charming than her other Doctor, but she missed his boyish charm and innocence. This Doctor was more like her, and that unnerved her a tad.

Then, after the wine had well and truly taken effect, they hashed out some grievances on their mind. River vented about religion, about all its related greatness and achievements she’d seen through her work, but how little it ever had to directly offer people. He enthusiastically agreed, especially about her distaste for selling an idea of some heaven religions had absolutely zero proof of in, at best, a misguided attempt to vainly soothe fear of death and, at worst, predatory attempts of extortion.

He vented about the fate that had befallen his latest companion, Donna Noble. The tragedy of her story shocked River. He followed that up with venting about the Time War.

She knew the very basics from her Doctor, that the Time Lords and the Daleks had a temporal war that had devastated countless worlds and times, which had finally been ended by the Doctor causing their mutual destruction in some manner. Where her Doctor seemed to forget that, this Doctor seemed to passionately regret it.

As he went into more detail about the war, River found herself horrified by how the temporal battleground of the war had seen reality so carelessly rewritten and unwritten.

Not just memories lost, but entire timelines, lifetimes lost. Had she on some level wrought this when she refused to shoot the Doctor at Lake Silencio? The thought of losing her memories was horrifying enough, the thought of losing the actual existence of her lives was too much to bear. No wonder he'd panicked when she was so flippant about messing up their timelines and meeting him younger than she was supposed to.

Eventually they came to talking about the damage the drashig had caused to Yggdrasil.

"It's rather ugly, isn't it," said River.

"Well...maybe now. Give it time."

"Why don't we?"

"What?"

"Why don't we give it time? You have a TARDIS. Let's see how it heals."

They did. A hundred years into the future, Yggdrasil had healed some, but the scars ran deep, and several sections of the tree the drashig had bit out were still missing.

"I guess it was too good to be true," River sighed.

"What was?"

"That it could be as beautiful again."

"River, it's a survivor. Those scars don't make it ugly, they make it strong. What a life it's led. It's more beautiful now, not less."

She looked at him, drinking him in. Then, she kissed him.

He kissed back.

"Wait," she said breathlessly, "I don't know if we're supposed to do that yet." Was this Doctor before or after her other Doctor? The other Doctor said they hadn't kissed before, if this Doctor was before him, then was she about to wreak temporal havoc again by rewriting time? Or had the other Doctor just meant that he hadn't kissed her with that face? Or, or, did-

He kissed her again, and they both stopped thinking or caring about anything besides each other in that moment. They stumbled into the TARDIS together, both clicking their fingers, one of them closing the TARDIS doors, the other inadvertently reopening them, so Yggdrasil watched over them as they lost themselves in each other.

THE DAY OF THE DOCTOR

In Stormcage, River only ever found herself visited by her first Doctor, her beautiful, boyish Doctor. But every now and again, out in the wilds of space on her own, she'd find herself tangled up in another adventure with the other Doctor, the rogue.

She came to assume he was the next regeneration of her first Doctor. It would explain a lot about their attitudes to certain things. On the slim off-chance she was wrong, she figured regenerations for him must burn up a portion of memories like they did for her, and that his more carnal memories were wiped out in the process, leading him to be so surprised at their apparent first kiss in Stormcage.

Sometimes when she was with either Doctor, for all she loved their appearances, she found them sort of...confused, blended. It was like she saw the commonality between them more than the regenerations separating them. Was this some Time Lord ability, to recognise one of their own regardless of changed appearance? The diaries became more and more useful as her sense of separation between the two Doctors slipped.

One day, her and the boyish Doctor took a trip to the other Asgard, the theme park planet, where they had another picnic together. Then, another time, her and the roguish Doctor had the merry idea of travelling centuries back into their Asgard's past, where'd they'd encountered...well, River, in spite of herself, liked to think of them as the old Gods. The Doctor had a different explanation, but seeing how happy she was to see one religion she didn't mind realised to life, kept his mouth shut. When it mattered.

"Did you ever count?" she asked him as he did a magic trick with a chicken leg to irritate Thor.

"Long story," he said, cheerfully but dismissively, as he always did when she brought up Time War business after that first, wondrous date. "Have you hidden my Converse?"

On another date, with the boyish Doctor, in the Underwell of Jim the Fish, she asked the same question.

"No, but seriously, did you ever count them?"

"What have you done with all my bowties?"

For the twentieth time in over a hundred years, she asked him again.

"Sweetie, please just tell me, did you ever count?" They were in the TARDIS workshop for an evening of basic maintenance and kebabs. She was doing all of the work and prodding him with a stick when she needed something passed to her.

"Does it matter?" he asked.

"Obviously."

"Why obviously?"

"Because you don't talk about it."

"Ow!"

"Zeus Plugs."

"I already gave them to you."

"Those are castanets."

"I had to adapt them for an emergency party with Madame de Pompadour. How's he doing?"

The robot clown's hands were twitching, as he lay on the bench, but the lights hadn't come on his eyes.

"There are no higher brain functions to restore," she said. "I think it's a very basic children's therapy bot."

"Ow!"

"Madame de Pompadour?"

"Jealous?"

"Of course I'm jealous. Keep your hands off her."

"Okay, so a children's therapy bot..."

"Popular on the outer colonies, for a while. Children would tell them stories they were too afraid to tell adults."

"And what would the bots do?"

"Take the pain away, according to the manual."

"But it just wanders about, asking how it looks."

"Yeah, it's got locked into its last therapy session. I'm trying to release it from a looping subroutine."

"Who gets their therapy from a bot?"

"People who aren't as lucky as you," she said, giving him the usual stare. "People who don't have someone like me. Any bad memories you want to share, sweetie?"

"I found two of my bowties cut in half," he said, prompting few minutes of silence to pass and she refused to respond. "What will we do with it when you've fixed it?"

"Drop it off somewhere it might be needed, I suppose." She honestly couldn't tell if she knew what she planned to do with it, and figured that was for the best. It was for his own good and, more than anyone, the two of them knew some things transcended memory.

"Good idea."

"Tell you what else is a good idea - don't. Don't ever count how many children were on Gallifrey that day. And if you've already counted, do your very best to forget about it."

"Why?"

"Because you live in a time machine. All of history is still happening outside those doors. On a good night that means everyone you ever met is still alive and you can't wait to see them again. On a bad night, it means everyone's dead, and you want to charge the universe, pretending you can do something about that. I know which version of you I prefer."

"What if there are people who died because of me? What if there are people I should have saved?"

"People die. All people, everywhere. We grieve and we move on. That is how we respect the dead. That is how we forgive ourselves in their presence and their absence."

She bent to her work again, giving him the courtesy of not looking at his face as he wrestled with that. He gave her the same, and they continued working under the dim lights of the TARDIS together.

Remembering. Forgetting.

THE TIME OF ANGELS

One lonely night in Stormcage, River received a visitor that was neither guard nor Doctor.

It was a priest.

“Doctor Song,” came his voice, deep and earnest, “I’m sure you haven’t heard of me, but I’ve heard of you.”

“And who are you?”

“Father Octavian, Bishop, second class.”

“Bishop? Of what church?”

“The Church, Doctor Song.”

“And what church is that?”

He looked at her oddly. “I understand you mightn’t approve, Doctor Song, but I’m not here to convert you. I’m here-”

“I should hope not.”

“...I’m here to offer you something.”

“Absolution? Salvation? Forgiveness? I was raised in a cult, ‘Father Octavian’. I’ve heard it all before.”

“Once again, Doctor Song, I am not here to convert you. I’m-”

“Really? My god, you’re serious aren’t you? Fifty-first century, I suppose the church really did move on in the end.” She wondered what her parents would think of Christianity, so dominant in their times, morphing in such a way.

“Doctor Song, I’m offering you a pardon.”

Now that did surprise her. “What? A pardon?”

“It’s not set in stone. I need your consent before I can clear it up with those above,” he said as River couldn’t stop herself rolling her eyes. “But there’s a mission I think could do with your...expertise. People have died. This is your chance to make some things right.”

“My expertise? Archaeology?”

“That is certainly part of it. Do you know of the Weeping Angels?”

“My, my, this is getting interesting.”

“I’ll take that as a yes. The question, then, is what can you offer us?”

“Hang on, aren’t you the one offering me a job?”

“I’m considering offering you a mission. If you were released from Stormcage, into my custody, to accompany myself and twenty clerics on a mission to isolate and contain a Weeping Angel onboard a starliner, how exactly could you help? What could you offer?”

She smiled. “An army, Father Octavian. The equivalent, at any rate.”

He looked at her pointedly for a moment, then nodded slowly.

“Just like that?” she asked. “Father - oh, I do rather like that - father, I know my charm is considerable, but I’m flattered how readily you recognise I am indeed speaking the truth.”

He gave her an odd look again. “Doctor Song, the Church-”

“Please, Father, if we’re to be a team, can you ease up on the church stuff?”

His mouth compressed into a small, hard line with distaste, but he nodded all the same. River could tell this was going to be fun.

They went on to discuss details and strategy for this ship, the Byzantium, containing the Weeping Angel, a species she’d indeed heard much of - their time displacement abilities made them an endless source of fascination (and funding) for archaeologists.

Curiously, Father Octavian entirely dropped any religious talk after she’d told him to, so much so that she went out of her way to bring it up back up now and again, to prod him a little. She was surprised by his sincerity. He really believed in his church, and what he was doing. He seemed a good man.

He knew of the Doctor too. That shouldn’t have surprised her, with how big a presence he’d made of himself before finally dialling things back, but the fact he’d come to offer a mission to the Doctor’s supposed murderer made little sense to her. She let him know that.

“Doctor Song, those things you mentioned earlier...absolution, salvation, forgiveness...they might seem like a joke to you, but to me, they seem very serious. I hate what you did, but neither do I like the thought of someone like you withering away in a cage like this as if their life was already over. The years you’ve spent here...the afterlives aren’t like this. There’s no reason life should be either. The Church wants to improve lives, not waste them.”

He was serious. A church had tried to “improve” her once, and even two lifetimes later the pain of those years still stung. But she could see Father Octavian wasn’t like that.

He was a good man, and believed in what he was doing. Good men were overrated, but if all went according to plan, she'd be seeing a much more interesting calibre of man very soon.

To that end, Father Octavian managed to organise her release from the prison's custody into his and, with a smattering of hallucinogenic lipstick and a zap of her vortex manipulator, she set to work.

A few hours before Father Octavian would come to visit her, River boarded the Byzantium. First, she enjoyed the party onboard. Second, she checked the vault the ship contained, ripping some video footage of the Angel contained within and dispensing the vault's guard in the process. Third, she made her way to where the ship's homebox was contained, to cut a message into it to be read thousands of years later.

After doing so, and exiting back into a corridor, she was cornered by a man she'd stirred some controversy with onboard not long before.

"The party's over, Doctor Song. Yet you're still on board."

"Sorry, Alistair. I needed to see what was in your vault. Do you all know what's down there? Any of you? Because I'll tell you something. This ship won't reach its destination."

"Wait till she runs. Don't make it look like an execution."

"Triple seven five slash three four nine by ten zero twelve slash acorn, oh, and I could do with an air corridor." She turned her gaze back to Alistair and his guards. "Like I said on the dance floor...you might want to find something to hang onto."

She blew a kiss, and the airlock behind her opened. Alistair and his guards gripped the ship's rails tightly as she was sucked out backwards, into space, only to be picked up by the TARDIS materialising in her flight path as requested. She landed bang on top of the Doctor as she entered the much smaller, much bigger, ship.

"Doctor?" asked her mother.

"River" asked her husband.

"Follow that ship," said River, and they did. "They've gone into warp drive. We're losing them. Stay close."

"I'm trying."

“Use the stabilisers.”

“There aren’t any stabilisers.”

“The blue switches.”

“Oh, the blue ones don’t do anything, they’re just blue.”

“Yes, they’re blue. Look, they’re the blue stabilisers.” She pressed them and the TARDIS promptly stopped shaking. “See?”

“Yeah, well, it’s just boring now, isn’t it? They’re boring-ers. They’re blue boring-ers.”

“Doctor, how come she can fly the TARDIS?”

“You call that flying the TARDIS? Ha!”

“Okay. I’ve mapped the probability vectors, done a foldback on the temporal isometry, charted the ship to its destination, and parked us right alongside.”

“Parked us? We haven’t landed.”

“Of course we’ve landed. I just landed her.”

“But it didn’t make the noise.”

“What noise?”

“You know, the…”

He went on to demonstrate his impression of a TARDIS materialisation.

“It’s not supposed to make that noise. You leave the brakes on.”

“Yeah, well, it’s a brilliant noise. I love that noise. Come along, Pond. Let’s have a look.”

“No, wait - environment checks.”

The Doctor opened the TARDIS doors and looked outside. “Nice out.”

“We’re somewhere in the Garn Belt. There’s an atmosphere. Early indications suggest that-”

“We’re on Alfava Metraxis, the seventh planet of the Dundra System. Oxygen-rich atmosphere, all toxins in the soft band, eleven hour day and chances of rain later.”

“He thinks he’s so hot when he does that,” she told her mother.

“How come you can fly the TARDIS?”

“Oh, I had lessons from the very best.”

“Well, yeah,” the Doctor agreed.

“It’s a shame you were busy that day. Right then, why did they land here?”

“They didn’t land.”

“Sorry?”

“You should’ve checked the homebox. It crashed.”

She exited the TARDIS to investigate, alone apparently, considering the doors shut behind her.

The Byzantium had crashed. The luxury starliner was not a burning wreck jutting out of a rock-carved building.

“What caused it to crash?” asked her mother, walking up beside her.

“Not me.

“Nah,” said the Doctor, “the airlock would’ve sealed seconds after you blew it. According to the homebox, the warp engines had a phase shift. No survivors.”

“A phase shift would have to be sabotage. I did warn them.”

“About what?”

“Well, at least the building was empty. A plain temple. Unoccupied for centuries.”

“Aren’t you going to introduce us?” asked her mother.

“Amy Pond, Professor River Song.”

“Ah, I’m going to be a Professor some day, am I? How exciting. Spoilers.”

“Yeah, but who is she, and how did she do that? She just left you a note in a museum.”

“Two things always guaranteed to show up in a museum - the homebox of a category four starliner and, sooner or later, him. It’s how he keeps score.”

“I know.”

“It’s hilarious, isn’t it?”

"I'm nobody's taxi service. I'm not going to be there to catch you every time you feel like jumping out of a spaceship."

"And you are so wrong. There's one survivor. There's a thing in the belly of that ship that can't ever die. Now he's listening." She engaged her communicator to check up on Father Octavian and his clerics. "You lot in orbit yet? Yeah, I saw it land. I'm at the crash site. Try and home in on my signal. Doctor, can you sonic me? I need to boost the signal so we can use it as a beacon."

He did so.

"Ooh, Doctor, you sonicked her."

"We have a minute. Shall we?" She got out her diary. "Where are we up to? Have we done the Bone Meadows?"

"What's the book?"

"Stay away from it," said the Doctor.

"What is it though?"

"Her diary."

"Our diary."

"Her past, my future. Time travel. We keep meeting in the wrong order."

Four small, dusty tornadoes wisped around them as Father Octavian and some of his clerics materialised.

"You promised me an army, Doctor Song."

"No, I promised you the equivalent of an army. This is the Doctor."

"Father Octavian, sir. Bishop, second class. Twenty clerics at my command. The troops are already in the drop ship and landing shortly. Doctor Song was helping us with a covert investigation. Has Doctor Song explained what we're dealing with?"

"Doctor," she asked sweetly, "what do you know of the Weeping Angels?"

They all set to work readying themselves for the mission. The other clerics mustered up. River changed into her combat fatigues, and mused over meeting the Doctor and her mother at such an early time. So, so young.

Eventually, it came time for the mission to proceed in earnest. She set to studying what footage they had, and radioed the Doctor so he could prove of some use.

“Doctor! Doctor? Father Octavian.”

He came to her in the drop ship, where she was examining a grainy projection of the Weeping Angel onboard.

“What do you think?” she asked him. “It’s from the security cameras in the Byzantium vault. I ripped it when I was onboard. Sorry about the quality. It’s four seconds. I’ve put it on loop.”

“Yeah, it’s an Angel. Hands covering its face.”

“You’ve encountered the Angels before,” said Father Octavian.

“Once, on Earth, a long time ago. But those were scavengers, barely surviving.”

“But it’s just a statue,” said her mother.

“It’s a statue when you see it.”

“Where did it come from?”

“Oh, pulled from the ruins of Razbahan, end of last century. It’s been in private hands ever since. Dormant all that time.”

“There’s a difference between dormant and patient.”

“What’s that mean - it’s a statue when you can see it?”

“The Weeping Angels can only move if they’re unseen, so legend has it.”

“No, it’s not a legend, it’s a quantum lock. In the sight of any living creature the Angels literally cease to exist. They’re just stone. The ultimate defence mechanism.”

“What, being a stone?”

“Being a stone until you turn your back.”

At the campsite, they continued discussing the situation.

“The hyperdrive would’ve split on impact. That whole ship’s going to be flooded with drive burn radiation, cracked electrons, gravity storms. Deadly to almost any living thing.”

“Deadly to an Angel?”

“Dinner to an Angel. The longer we leave it there, the stronger it will grow. Who built that temple? Are they still around?”

“The Aplans. Indigenous lifeform. They died out four-hundred years ago.”

“Two-hundred years late the planet was terraformed. Currently there are six billion human colonists.”

“Whoo, you lot, you’re everywhere. You’re like rabbits. I’ll never get done saving you.”

“Sir, if there is a clear and present danger to the local population...”

“Oh, there is. Bad as it gets. Bishop, lock and load.”

“Verger, how and we doing with those explosives? Doctor Song, with me.”

“Two minutes. Sweetie, I need you.” He eventually rejoined her. “I found this. Definitive work on the Angels. Well, the only one. Written by a madman. It’s barely readable, but I’ve marked a few passages.”

“Not bad,” he said, rifling through the pages. “Bit slow in the middle. Didn’t you hate his girlfriend? No, no, hang on, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait.”

“Doctor Song?” asked radioed in her mother. “Did you have more than one clip of the Angel?”

“No, just the four seconds.”

“This book is wrong. What’s wrong with this book? It’s wrong.”

“It’s strange when you go all baby-face. How early is this for you?”

“Very early.”

“So you don’t know who I am yet?”

“How do you know who I am? I don’t always look the same.”

“I’ve got pictures of all your faces,” she said, thinking back on the first time she’d meet the roguish Doctor and the conversation they’d had over her pictures of his faces. “You never show up in the right order, though. I need the spotter’s guide.”

“Why aren’t there pictures?”

“There was a bit about images. What was that?”

“Yes, hang on... ‘that which holds the image of an angel becomes itself an angel.’”

“What does that mean? An image of an Angel becomes itself an Angel?”

“Doctor,” screamed her mother over the the radio. “It’s in the room!”

“Amy!”

“Doctor!”

“Are you alright? What’s happening?”

“Doctor? Doctor, it’s coming out of the television. The Angel is here.”

“Don’t take your eyes off it,” said the Doctor as he activated his sonic screwdriver against the keypad lock. “Keep looking. It can’t move if you’re looking.”

“What’s wrong?” River asked.

“Deadlocked.”

“There is no deadlock.”

“Don’t blink, Amy. Don’t even blink.”

“What are you doing?”

“Cutting the power. It’s using the screen; I’m turning the screen off. No good, it’s deadlocked the whole system.”

“There’s no deadlock.”

“There is now.”

“Help me!” screamed her mother.

“Can you turn it off?”

“Doctor.”

“The screen. Can you turn it off?”

“I tried.”

“Try again. But don’t take your eyes off the Angel.”

"I'm not."

"Each time it moves, it'll move faster. Don't even blink."

River tried to cut through the door with her pistol torch.

"I'm not blinking. Have you ever tried not blinking? It just keeps switching back on."

"Yeah, it's the Angel."

"But it's just a recording."

"No, anything that takes the image of an Angel is an Angel. What are you doing?"

"I'm trying to cut through," said River. "It's not even warm."

"There is no way in. It's not physically possible."

"Doctor," said Amy, "what's it going to do to me?"

"Just keep looking at it. Don't stop looking."

"Just tell me. Tell me. Tell me!"

"Amy, not the eyes. Look at the Angel, but don't look at the eyes."

"Why?"

"What is it?" asked River.

"The eyes are not the windows of the soul. They are the doors. Beware what may enter there."

"Doctor, what did you say?"

"Don't look at the eyes!"

"No, about images. What did you say about images?"

"Whatever holds the image of an Angel, is an Angel..."

River and the Doctor finally succeeded in bursting into the room, just as the monitor turned off.

"I froze it. There was a sort of blip on the tape and I froze it on the blip. It wasn't the image of an Angel anymore. That was good, yeah? It was, wasn't it? That was pretty good."

"That was amazing."

"River, hug Amy."

"Why?"

"Because I'm busy."

"I'm fine."

"You're brilliant."

"Thanks. Yeah, I kind of creamed it, didn't I?"

"So, it was here? That was the Angel?"

"That was a projection of the Angel. It's reaching out, getting a good look at us. It's no longer dormant."

An explosion outside interrupted their conversation.

"Okay, now it starts," said the Doctor.

"Coming?" River asked her mother.

"Yeah, coming. There's just something in my eye.

Together they proceeded to the entrance chamber, where they climbed down a rope ladder in what turned out to be a very large underground space.

"Do we have a gravity globe?" asked the Doctor.

"Grav globe," said Father Octavian, answering that question.

"Where are we?" asked her mother as a cleric handed the gravity globe to the Doctor.

"What is this?"

"It's an Aplan Mortarium, sometimes called a Maze of the Dead."

"What's that?"

"Well, if you happen to be a creature of living stone," said the Doctor as he kicked the globe into the air, where it promptly illuminated the vast array of mausoleums and statuary surrounding them, "the perfect hiding place."

"I guess this makes it a bit trickier."

“A bit, yeah.”

“A stone Angel on the loose amongst stone statues. A lot harder than I’d prayed for.”

“A needle in a haystack.”

“A needle that looks like hay. A hay-like needle of death. A hay-like needle of death in a haystack of, er, statues. No, yours was fine.”

“Right. Check every single statue in this chamber. You know what you’re looking for. Complete visual inspection. One question - how do we fight it?”

“We find it, and hope.”

Father Octavian stopped River as she went to investigate further.

“He doesn’t know yet, does he?” he asked. “Who and what you are.”

“It’s too early in his timestream.”

“Well, make sure he doesn’t work it out, or he’s not going to help us.”

“I won’t let you down. Believe you me, I have no intention of going back to prison.”

“Sir?” asked one of the clerics. “Side chamber. One visible exit.”

“Check it out. Angelo, go with him.”

River went to join the Doctor and her mother up towards the terraces. Her mother was rubbing her eye furtively.

“You alright?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. So, what’s a Maze of the Dead?”

“Oh, it’s not as bad as it sounds. It’s just a labyrinth with dead people buried in the walls. Okay, that was fairly bad. Right, give me your arm. This won’t hurt a bit.” Her mother did so, and River injected her with a viro stabiliser in return.

“Ow!”

“There, you see. I lied. It’s a viro stabiliser. Stabilises your metabolism against radiation, drive burn, anything. You’re going to need it when we get up to that ship.”

“So, what’s he like? In the future, I mean. Because you know him in the future, don’t you?”

"The Doctor? Well, the Doctor's the Doctor."

"Oh. Well, that's very helpful. Mind if I write that down."

"Yes, we are."

"Sorry, what?" came the voice of the Doctor from a few metres away, where he was apparently deep in concentration.

"Talking about you."

"I wasn't listening. I'm busy."

"Ah. The other way up."

He turned River's portable computer around.

"Yeah."

"You're so his wife."

"Oh, Amy, Amy, Amy. This is the Doctor we're talking about. Do you really think it could be anything that simple?"

"Yep."

"You're good. I'm not saying you're right, but you are very good."

After a bit more time investigating, the sound of gunfire drew the three of them back to the main group, where they discovered a young cleric had shot up a statue.

"Sorry, sorry, I thought...I thought it looked at me."

"We know what the Angel looks like," said Father Octavian. "Is that the Angel?"

"No sir."

"No sir it is not. According to the Doctor we are facing an enemy of unknowable power and infinite evil, so it would be good, it would be very good, if we could all remain calm in the presence of decor."

"What's your name?" the Doctor asked the cleric.

"Bob sir."

"Ah, that's a great name. I love Bob."

"It's a Sacred Name. We all have Sacred Names. They're given to us in the service of the Church."

"Sacred Bob. More like Scared Bob now, eh?"

"Yes sir."

"Ah, good. Scared keeps you fast. Anyone in this room who isn't scared is a moron. Carry on."

"We'll be moving into the maze in two minutes. You say with Christian and Angelo. Guard the approach."

They proceeded into the maze.

"Isn't there a chance this lot's just going to collapse?" asked her mother. "There's a whole ship up there."

"Incredible builders, the Aplans."

"Had dinner with their Chief Architect once. Two heads are better than one."

"What, you mean you helped him?"

"No, I mean he had two heads. That book, the very end, what did it say?"

"Hang on."

"Read it to me."

"What if we had ideas that could think for themselves? What if one day our dreams no longer needed us? When these things occur and are held to be true, the time will be upon us. The time of Angels."

They continued their ascent.

"Are we there yet? It's a hell of a climb."

"The Maze is on six levels, representing the ascent of the soul. Only two levels to go."

"Lovely species, the Aplans. We should visit them some time."

"I thought they were all dead?"

"So is Virginia Woolf. I'm on her bowling team. Very relaxed, sort of cheerful. Well, that's having two heads of course. You're never short of a snog with an extra head."

"Doctor, there's something. I don't know what it is."

"Yeah, there's something wrong. Don't know what it is yet either. Working on it. Of course, then they started having laws against self-marrying. I mean, what was that about? But that's the Church for you. Er, no offence Bishop."

"Quite a lot taken if that's all right Doctor. Lowest point in the wreckage is only about fifty feet up from here. That way."

"The Church had a point, if you think about it. The divorces must have been messy."

"Oh."

"What's wrong?"

"Oh."

"Exactly."

"How could we have not noticed that?"

"Low level perception filter, or maybe we're thick."

"What's wrong sir?"

"Nobody move. Nobody move. Everybody stay exactly where they are. Bishop, I am truly sorry. I've made a mistake and we are all in terrible danger."

"What danger?"

"The Aplans."

"The Aplans?"

"They've got two heads."

"Yes, I get that. So?"

"So why don't the statues? Everyone, over there. Just move. Don't ask questions, don't speak. Okay, I want you all to switch off your torches."

"Sir?"

"Just do it. Okay, I'm going to turn off this one too, just for a moment."

"Are you sure about this?"

“No.”

All light went out, then was back in an instant.

“Oh my god. They’ve moved.”

“They’re Angels. All of them.”

“But they can’t be.”

“Clerics, keep watching them. Every statue in this Maze, every single one, is a Weeping Angel. They’re coming after us.”

“But there was only one Angel on the ship. Just the one, I swear.”

“Could it have been here already?”

“The Aplans. What happened? How did they die out?”

“Nobody knows.”

“We know...”

“They don’t look like Angels.”

“And they’re not fast. You said they were fast. They should have had us by now.”

“Look at them. They’re dying, losing their form. They must have been down here for centuries, starving.”

“Losing their image?”

“And their image is their power. Power. Power!”

“Doctor?”

“Don’t you see? All that radiation spilling out the drive burn. The crash of the Byzantium wasn’t an accident, it was a rescue mission for the Angels. We’re in the middle of an army, and it’s waking up.”

“We need to get out of here, fast.”

“Bob, Angelo, Christian, come in please. Any of you, come in.”

“It’s Bob, sir,” came a voice over the radio. “Sorry sir.”

"Bob, are Angelo and Christian with you? All the statues are active. I repeat, all the statues are activate."

"I know, sir. Angelo and Christian are dead, sir. The statues killed them, sir."

"Bob," said the Doctor, grabbing Father Octavian's radio, "Sacred Bob, it's me, the Doctor."

"I'm talking to-"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, shut up."

"I'm on my way up to you, sir. I'm homing in on your signal."

"Ah, well done Bob. Scared keeps you fast. Told you, didn't I? Your friends, Bob, what did the Angel do to them?"

"Snapped their necks, sir."

"That's odd. That's not how the Angels kill you. They displace you back in time. Unless they needed the bodies for something."

"Bob, did you check their datapacks for vital signs? We may be able to initiate a rescue plan."

"Oh, don't be an idiot. The Angels don't leave you alive. Bob, keep running, but tell me - how did you escape?"

"I didn't escape, sir. The Angel killed me too."

"What do you mean 'the Angel killed you too'?"

"Snapped my neck, sir. Wasn't as painless as I expected, but it was pretty quick, so that was something."

"If you're dead, how can I be talking to you?"

"You're not talking to me, sir. The Angel has no voice. It stripped me cerebral cortex from my body and reanimated a version of my consciousness to communicate with you. Sorry about the confusion."

"So when you say you're on your way up to us..."

"It's the Angel that's coming, sir, yes. No way out."

"Then we get out through the wreckage. Go! Go, go, go, all of you, run."

They did so, the Doctor and her mother lagging behind. When they rejoined them in the tunnel to the ship, the metal was creaking mightily.

“Well, there it is. The Byzantium.”

“It’s got to be thirty feet. How do we get up there?”

“Check all these exits. I want them all secure.”

The Doctor and her mother kept to themselves a bit more as the group proceeded with the mission. Eventually every light source flickering proved a cause for concern.

“The statues are advancing along all corridors. And, sir, my torch keeps flickering.”

“They all do.”

“So does the gravity globe.”

“Clerics, we’re down to four men. Expect incoming.”

“Yeah, it’s the Angels. They’re coming. And they’re draining the power for themselves.”

“Which means we won’t be able to see them.”

“Which means we can’t stay here.”

“Two more incoming.”

“Any suggestions?”

“The statues are advancing on all sides. We don’t have the climbing equipment to reach the Byzantium.”

“There’s no way up, no way back, no way out. No pressure, but this is usually when you have a really good idea.”

“There’s always a way out.” The Doctor’s voice echoed down the tunnel.

“Doctor?” came Bob’s voice over the radio. “Can I speak to the Doctor, please?”

“Hello, Angels. What’s your problem?”

“Your power will not last much longer, and the Angels will be with you shortly. Sorry, sir.”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“There’s something the Angels are very keen you should know before the end.”

"Which is?"

"I died in fear."

"I'm sorry?"

"You told me my fear would keep me alive, but I died afraid, in pain and alone. You made me trust you, and when it mattered, you let me down."

"What are they doing?"

"They're trying to make him angry."

"I'm sorry, sir. The Angels were very keen for you to know that."

"Well then, the Angels have made their second mistake because I'm not going to let that pass. I'm sorry you're dead, Bob, but I swear to whatever is left of you, they will be sorrier."

"But you're trapped, sir, and about to die."

"Yeah, I'm trapped. And you know what? Speaking of traps, this trap has got a great big mistake in it. A great big, whopping mistake."

"What mistake, sir?"

"Trust me?" the Doctor asked her mother in a low voice.

"Yeah."

"Trust me?" he asked River.

"Always."

"You lot, trust me?"

"Sir, two more incoming."

"We have faith, sir."

"Then give me your gun. I'm about to do something incredibly stupid and dangerous. When I do, jump!"

"Jump where?"

"Just jump, high as you can. Come on, leap of faith, Bishop. On my signal."

"What signal?"

"You won't miss it."

"Sorry, can I ask again?" came Bob's voice. "You mentioned a mistake we made."

"Oh, big mistake. Huge. Didn't anyone every tell you there's one thing you never put in a trap? If you're smart, if you value your continued existence, if you have any plans about seeing tomorrow, there is one thing you never, ever put in a trap."

"And what would that be, sir?"

"Me," said the Doctor, as he fired above.

FLESH AND STONE

"Up, look up," he said afterwards, as everyone struggled to find their footing on some sort of artificial surface.

"Are you okay" River asked her mother.

"What happened?"

"We jumped."

AMY: Jumped where?

"Up. Up. Look up."

"Where are we?"

"Exactly where we were."

"No we're not."

"Move your feet."

The Doctor waved his sonic screwdriver at a circular hatch with six glowing lights.

"Doctor, what am I looking at? Explain."

"Oh, come on, Amy, think. The ship crashed with the power still on, yeah? So what else is still on? The artificial gravity. One good jump, and up we fell. Shot out the grav globe to give us an updraft, and here we are."

"Doctor, the statues. They look more like Angels now."

"They're feeding on the radiation from the wreckage, draining all the power from the ship, restoring themselves. Within an hour, they'll be an army." The hatch opened and a light burst out. "They're taking out the lights. Look at them. Look at the Angels. Into the ship, now. Quickly, all of you."

"How?"

The Doctor dropped through the now-open hatch.

"Doctor!"

"It's just a corridor. The gravity orientates to the floor. Now, in here, all of you. Don't take your eyes off the Angels. Move, move, move."

"Okay, men. Go, go, go!"

The Doctor worked away at a control panel while the rest of them assembled inside.

"The Angels," said Father Octavian as the hatch closed, "presumably they can jump up too?"

"They're here, now. In the dark, we're finished." A bulkhead further along the corridor began to close. "Run!"

"This whole place is a death trap."

"No, it's a time bomb. Well, it's a death trap and a time bomb. And now it's a dead end. Nobody panic. Oh, just me then. What's through here?"

"Secondary flight deck."

"Okay. so we've basically run up the inside of a chimney, yeah? So what if the gravity fails?"

"I've thought about that."

"And?"

"And we'll all plunge to our deaths. See? I've thought about it. The security protocols are still live. There's no way to override them. It's impossible."

"How impossible?" asked River, overriding them.

"Two minutes."

She got the outer hatch open.

"The hull is breached and the power's failing."

The lights went out, and a silhouetted arm appeared across the hatch.

"Sir, incoming."

"Doctor? Lights."

Four Angels began to enter, flickering inside.

"Clerics, keep watching them."

"And don't look at their eyes. Anywhere else. Not the eyes. I've isolated the lighting grid. They can't drain the power now."

"Good work, Doctor."

"Yes. Good, good, good. Good in many ways. Good you like it so far."

"So far?"

"Well, there's only one way to open this door. I guess I'll need to route all the power in this section through the door control."

"Good. Fine. Do it."

"Including the lights. All of them. I'll need to turn out the lights."

"How long for?"

"Fraction of a second. Maybe longer. Maybe quite a bit longer."

"Maybe?"

"I'm guessing. We're being attacked by statues in a crashed ship. There isn't a manual for this."

"Doctor, we lost the torches. We'll be in total darkness."

"No other way, Bishop."

"Doctor Song, I've lost good clerics today. You trust this man?"

"I absolutely trust him."

"He's not some kind of madman, then?"

"I absolutely trust him."

"Excuse me."

Father Octavian leaned in to talk to River out of hearing of the others. "I'm taking your word, because you're the only one who can manage this guy. But that only works so long as he doesn't know who you are. You cost me any more men, and I might just tell him. Understood?"

"Understood."

Okay, Doctor," he said, addressing the group at large again, "we've got your back."

"Bless you, bishop."

"Combat distance, ten feet. As soon as the lights go down, continuous fire. Full spread over the hostiles. Do not stop firing while the lights are out. Shotgun protocol. We don't have bullets to waste."

"Amy, when the lights go down, the wheel should release. Spin it clockwise four turns."

"Ten."

"No, four. Four turns."

"Yeah, four. I heard you."

"Ready!" he said, before shoving his sonic screwdriver into the control unit.

"On my count, then. God be with us all. Three, two, one, fire!"

The lights went out, and the clerics began to shoot at the approaching Angels.

"Turn!"

"Doctor, it's opening. It's working."

They all squeezed through the bulkhead as it opened narrowly.

"Fall back!"

They ran along another corridor inside, into the secondary flight deck.

"Doctor, quickly."

"Doctor!"

The Angels thumped on the door as the Doctor entered with it closing behind him. The wheel began to turn.

“Doctor! What are you doing?”

Father Octavian placed a device on the door and the wheel stopped turning.

“Magnetised the door. Nothing could turn that wheel now.”

“Yeah?” said the Doctor, as the wheel turned.

“Dear God!”

“Ah, now you're getting it. You've bought us time though. That's good. I am good with time.”

“Doctor.”

The wheel on a second door started to turn as well.

“Seal that door. Seal it now.”

“We're surrounded.”

The door on the left presented the same issue.

“Seal it. Seal that door. Doctor, how long have we got?”

“Five minutes, max.”

“Nine.”

“Five.”

“Five. Right. Yeah.”

“Why'd you say nine?”

“I didn't.”

“We need another way out of here.”

“There isn't one.”

“Yeah, there is. Course there is. This is a galaxy class ship. Goes for years between planetfalls. So, what do they need?”

"Of course..."

"Of course what? What do they need?"

"Can we get in there?"

"Well, it's a sealed unit, but they must have installed it somehow. This whole wall should slide up. There's clamps. Release the clamps."

"What's through there? What do they need?"

"They need to breathe."

The rear wall of the flight deck slid open to reveal the oxygen factor within.

"But, that's, that's a-"

"It's an oxygen factory."

"It's a forest."

"Yeah, it's a forest. It's an oxygen factory."

"And if we're lucky, an escape route."

"Eight."

"What did you say?"

"Nothing."

"Is there another exit? Scan the architecture, we don't have time to get lost in there."

"On it. Stay where you are until I've checked the rad levels."

"But trees, on a space ship?"

"Oh, more than trees. Way better than trees. You're going to love this. Treeborgs. Trees plus technology. Branches become cables become sensors on the hull. A forest sucking in starlight, breathing out air. It even rains. There's a whole mini-climate. This vault is an ecopod running right through the heart of the ship. A forest in a bottle on a space ship in a maze. Have I impressed you yet, Amy Pond?"

"Seven."

"Seven?"

"Sorry, what?"

"You said seven."

"No. I didn't."

"Yes. you did."

"Doctor, there's an exit, far end of the ship, into the Primary Flight Deck."

"Oh, good. That's where we need to go."

"Plotting a safe path now."

"Quick as you like."

"Doctor?" came Bob's unwelcome voice again. "Excuse me? Hello, Doctor? Angel Bob here, sir."

"Ah. There you are, Angel Bob. How's life? Sorry, bad subject."

"The Angels are wondering what you hope to achieve."

"Achieve? We're not achieving anything. We're just hanging. It's nice in here. Consoles, comfy chairs, a forest. How's things with you?"

"The Angels are feasting, sir. Soon we will be able to absorb enough power to consume this vessel, this world. and all the stars and worlds beyond."

"Well, we've got comfy chairs. Did I mention?"

"We have no need of comfy chairs."

"I made him say comfy chairs."

"Six."

"Okay, Bob, enough chat. Here's what I want to know. What have you done to Amy?"

"There is something in her eye."

"What's in her eye?"

"We are."

"What's he talking about? Doctor, I'm five. I mean, five. Fine! I'm fine."

"You're counting."

"Counting?"

"You're counting down from ten. You have been for a couple of minutes."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

"Well, counting down to what?"

"I don't know."

"We shall take her. We shall take all of you. We shall have dominion over all time and space."

"Get a life, Bob. Oops, sorry again. There's power on this ship, but nowhere near that much."

"With respect, sir, there's more power on this ship than you yet understand." A terrible screeching sound punctuated Bob's mysterious comment.

"What's that? Dear god, what is it?"

"They're back."

"It's hard to put in your terms, Doctor Song, but as best I understand it, the Angels are laughing."

"Laughing?"

"Because you haven't noticed yet, sir. The Doctor in the TARDIS hasn't noticed."

"Doctor."

"No. Wait. There's something I've missed."

The crack from her mother's bedroom tore across the bulkhead above the entrance. Rebooting the universe, it was history for her, but all ahead for them.

"That's, that's, that's like the crack from my bedroom wall from when I was a little girl."

"Yes. Two parts of space and time that should never have touched."

"Okay, enough. We're moving out."

"Agreed. Doctor?"

"Yeah, fine."

"What are you doing?"

"Right with you," he said as he scanned the crack.

"We're not leaving without you."

"Oh yes, you are. Bishop?"

"Miss Pond, Doctor Song, now!"

"Doctor?"

"Come on!"

The Doctor joined them in the forest a moment later.

"Amy? Amy, what's wrong?" River asked.

"Four."

"Med-scanner, now."

"Doctor Song, we can't stay here. We've got to keep moving."

"We wait for the Doctor."

"Our mission is to make this wreckage safe and neutralise the Angels. Until that is achieved"

"Father Octavian, when the Doctor's in the room, your one and only mission is to keep him alive long enough to get everyone else home. And trust me, it's not easy. Now, if he's dead back there, I'll never forgive myself. And if he's alive, I'll never forgive him. And, Doctor, you're standing right behind me, aren't you?"

"Oh, yeah."

"I hate you."

"You don't. Bishop, the Angels are in the forest."

"We need visual contact on every line of approach."

"How did you get past them?"

"I found a crack in the wall and told them it was the end of the universe."

"What was it?"

"The end of the universe. Let's have a look, then."

"So, what's wrong with me?"

"Nothing. You're fine."

"Everything. You're dying."

"Doctor!"

"Yes, you're right. If we lie to her, she'll get all better. Right. Amy, Amy, Amy. What's the matter with Amelia? Something's in her eye. What does that mean? Does it mean anything?"

"Doctor."

"Busy."

"Scared."

"Course you're scared. You're dying. Shut up."

"Okay, let him think."

"What happened? She stared at the Angel. She looked into the eyes of an Angel for too long."

"Sir! Angel incoming."

"And here."

"Keep visual contact. Do not let it move."

"Come on, come on, come on. Wakey, wakey. She watched an Angel climb out of the screen. She stared at the Angel and, and-"

"The image of an Angel is an Angel."

"A living mental image in a living human mind. But we stare at them to stop them getting closer. We don't even blink, and that is exactly what they want. Because as long as our eyes are open, they can climb inside. There's an Angel in her mind. "

"Three. Doctor, it's coming. I can feel it. I'm going to die."

"Please just shut up. I'm thinking. Now, counting. What's that about? Bob, why are they making her count?"

"To make her afraid, sir."

"Okay, but why? What for?"

"For fun, sir."

River watched him throw the communicator aside, disgusted.

"Doctor, what's happening to me? Explain."

"Inside your head, in the vision centres of your brain, there's an Angel. It's like there's a screen, a virtual screen inside your mind and the Angel is climbing out of it, and it's coming to shut you off."

"Then what I do?"

"If it was a real screen, what would we do? We'd pull the plug. We'd kill the power. But we can't just knock her out, the Angel would just take over."

"Then what? Quickly."

"We've got to shut down the vision centres of her brain. We've got to pull the plug. Starve the Angel."

"Doctor, she's got seconds."

"How would you starve your lungs?"

"I'd stop breathing."

"Amy, close your eyes."

"No. No, I don't want to."

"Good, because that's not you, that's the Angel inside you. It's afraid. Do it. Close your eyes."

Her mother squeezed her eyes shut. The med-scanner's display changed from red to green.)

"She's normalising. Oh, you did it. You did it."

"Sir? Two more incoming."

"Three more over here."

"Still weak. Dangerous to move her."

"So, can I open my eyes now?"

"Amy, listen to me. If you open your eyes now for more than a second, you will die. The Angel is still inside you. We haven't stopped it, we've just sort of paused it. You've used up your countdown. You cannot open your eyes."

"Doctor, we're too exposed here. We have to move on."

"We're too exposed everywhere. And Amy can't move. And anyway, that's not the plan."

"There's a plan?"

"I don't know yet. I haven't finished talking. Right! Father, you and your clerics, you're going to stay here, look after Amy. If anything happens to her, I'll hold every single one of you personally responsible, twice. River, you and me, we're going to find the Primary Flight Deck which is...a quarter of a mile straight ahead, and from there we're going to stabilise the wreckage, stop the Angels, and cure Amy."

"How?"

"I'll do a thing."

"What thing?"

"I don't know. It's a thing in progress. Respect the thing. Moving out!"

"Doctor, I'm coming with you. My clerics'll look after Miss Pond. These are my best men. They'd lay down their lives in her protection."

"I don't need you."

"I don't care. Where Doctor Song goes, I go."

"What? You two engaged or something?"

"Yes, in a manner of speaking. Marco, you're in charge till I get back."

"Sir."

"Doctor? Please, can't I come with you?"

"You'd slow us down, Miss Pond."

"I don't want to sound selfish, but you'd really speed me up."

"You'll be safer here. We can't protect you on the move. I'll be back for you soon as I can, I promise."

"You always say that."

"I always come back. Good luck, everyone. Behave. Do not let that girl open her eyes. And keep watching the forest. Stop those Angels advancing. Amy, later. River, going to need your computer!"

"Yeah. Later."

The Doctor caught up with River and Father Octavian a few moments later, and inputted the readings from his sonic screwdriver into her mini-computer.

"What's that?"

"Er, readings from a crack in the wall."

"How can a crack in the wall be the end of the universe?"

"Don't know, but here's what I think. One day there's going to be a very big bang. So big every moment in history, past and future, will crack."

"Is that possible?" asked River, humouring this younger Doctor yet to see how right he was. "How?"

"How can you be engaged, in a manner of speaking?"

"Well, sucker for a man in uniform."

"Doctor Song's in my personal custody. I released her from the Stormcage Containment Facility four days ago and I am legally responsible for her until she's accomplished her mission and earned her pardon. Just so we understand each other."

"You were in Stormcage?"

Her computer chirped.

"What? What is that?"

"The date. The date of the explosion, where the crack begins."

“And for those of us who can't read the base code of the universe?”

“Amy's time.”

Eventually, they came to the Primary Flight Deck.

“It doesn't open it from here, but it's the Primary Flight Deck. This has got to be a service hatch or something.”

“Hurry up and open it. Time's running out.”

“What? What did you say? Time's running out, is that what you said?”

“Yeah. I just meant...”

“I know what you meant. Hush. But what if it could?”

“What if what could?”

“Time. What if time could run out?”

“Got it.”

It took some time, but River managed to make her way into the Primary Flight Deck.

“There's a teleport. If I can get it to work, we can beam the others here. Where's Octavian?”

“Octavian's dead. So is that teleport. You're wasting your time. I'm going to need your communicator.” She let him have it. “Amy? Amy is that you?”

“Doctor?” came her voice from the other end.

“Where are you? Are the clerics with you?”

“They're gone. There was a light and they walked into the light. Doctor, they didn't even remember each other.”

“No, they wouldn't.”

“What is that light?”

“Time running out. Amy, I'm sorry, I made a mistake. I should never have left you there.”

“Well, what do I do now?”

“You come to us. The Primary Flight Deck, the other end of the forest.”

"I can't see. I can't open my eyes."

"Turn on the spot."

"Sorry, what?"

"Just do it. Turn on the spot. When the communicator sounds like my screwdriver, that means you're facing the right way. Follow the sound. You have to start moving now. There's time energy spilling out of that crack, and you have to stay ahead of it."

"But the Angels, they're everywhere."

"I'm sorry, I really am, but the Angels can only kill you."

"What does the time energy do?"

"Just keep moving!"

"Tell me."

"If the time energy catches up with you, you'll never have been born. It will erase every moment of your existence. You will never have lived at all. Now, keep your eyes shut and keep moving."

"What else have you got, River, tell me?"

"What's that?" River asked as a clanging noise resounded around them.

"The Angels running from the fire. They came here to feed on the time energy? Now it's going to feed on them. Amy, listen to me, I'm sending a bit of software to your communicator. It's a proximity detector. It'll beep if there's something in your way. You just manoeuvre till the beeping stops because, Amy, this is important, the forest is full of Angels. You're going to have to walk like you can see."

"Well, what do you mean?"

"Look, just keep moving."

"That time energy, what's it going to do?"

"Er, keep eating."

"How do we stop it?"

"Feed it."

“Feed it what?”

“A big, complicated space-time event should shut it up for a while.”

“Like what, for instance?”

“Like me, for instance!”

“What’s that?” her mother asked as the communicator beeped.

“It’s a warning. There are Angels around you now. Amy, listen to me. This is going to be hard but I know you can do it. The Angels are scared and running and, right now, they’re not that interested in you. They’ll assume you can see them and their instincts will kick in. All you’ve got to do is walk like you can see. Just don’t open your eyes. Walk like you can see. You’re not moving. You have to do this. Now. You have to do this!”

“Doctor,” said her mother, after a few moments of presumably doing as he said, “I can’t find the communicator. I dropped it. I can’t find it. Doctor. Doctor. Doctor. Doctor! Doctor.”

River finally got the teleport working, and so her mother stumbled into the Primary Flight Deck, where River quickly grabbed her.

“Don’t open your eyes. You’re on the flight deck. The Doctor’s here. I teleported you. See? Told you I could get it working.”

“River Song, I could bloody kiss you.”

“Ah well, maybe when you’re older.”

An alarm started to blare.

“What’s that?”

“The Angels are draining the last of the ship’s power, which means the shield’s going to release.”

The bulkhead opening into the forest rose up, revealing the amassed Angels.

“Angel Bob, I presume.”

“The Time Field is coming. It will destroy our reality.”

“Yeah, and look at you all, running away. What can I do for you?”

"There is a rupture in time. The Angels calculate that if you throw yourself into it, it will close, and they will be saved."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah. Could do, could do that. But why?"

"Your friends will also be saved."

"Well, there is that."

"I've travelled in time," said River. "I'm a complicated space time event too. Throw me in."

"h, be serious. Compared to me, these Angels are more complicated than you, and it would take every one of them to amount to me, so get a grip."

"Doctor, I can't let you do this."

"No, seriously, get a grip."

"You're not going to die here!"

"No, I mean it. River, Amy, get a grip."

"Oh, you genius."

"Sir, the Angels need you to sacrifice yourself now."

"Thing is, Bob, the Angels are draining all the power from this ship. Every last bit of it. And you know what? I think they've forgotten where they're standing. I think they've forgotten the gravity of the situation. Or to put it another way, Angels..."

A monitor read 'Gravity Failing'. River put her mother's hands on the handles of a console module. You hold on tight and don't you let go for anything," she said.

"Night, night," said the Doctor.

'Gravity Failed' displayed the monitor. Their feet left the floor as the spaceship tilted, and the Angels fell backwards through the forest, disappearing into the crack which then closed.

The mission accomplished, more or less, they retreated back to the beach, with the TARDIS nearby.

"Ah," said her mother, wrapped in a blanket. "Bruised everywhere."

"Me too."

"You didn't have to climb out with your eyes shut."

"Neither did you. I kept saying. The Angels all fell into the Time Field. The Angel in your memory never existed. It can't harm you now."

"Then why do I remember it at all? Those guys on the ship didn't remember each other."

"You're a time traveller now. Amy. It changes the way you see the universe, forever. Good, isn't it?"

"And the crack, is that gone too?"

"Yeah, for now. But the explosion that caused it is still happening. Somewhere out there, somewhere in time."

The remaining clerics joined them on the beach. The Doctor approached River closely.

"You, me, handcuffs," she said. "Must it always end this way?"

"What now?"

"The prison ship's in orbit. They'll beam me up any second. I might have done enough to earn a pardon this time. We'll see."

"Octavian said you killed a man."

"Yes, I did."

"A good man."

"A very good man. The best man I've ever known."

"Who?"

"It's a long story. Doctor. It can't be told, it has to be lived. No sneak previews. Well, except for this one. You'll see me again quite soon, when the Pandorica opens."

"The Pandorica. Ha! That's a fairy tale."

"Doctor, aren't we all? I'll see you there."

"I look forward to it."

"I remember it well."

"Bye, River."

"See you, Amy. Oh, I think that's my ride."

"Can I trust you. River Song?"

"If you like. Ha, but where's the fun in that?"

With that, she was beamed away onto the prison ship, and from there, back to Stormcage.

THE WEDDING OF RIVER SONG

Had Father Octavian survived, perhaps he's have managed to secure her that pardon. But he hadn't, and any faith she'd placed in him remained unfulfilled. If any of his afterlives were real - and somehow, that idea didn't feel as poisonous to River as it once did - then she hoped he was happy in one of them.

Back in her cell, with the closure of finally being freed being denied of her, she decided to be proactive and bring about some closure herself. So she took advantage of a meteor shower around the right place and right time and homed in on her mother's house shortly after she'd have returned from all the events surrounding River's wedding and the Doctor's apparent death.

"Heard there was a freak meteor shower two miles away, so I got us a bottle."

"Thank you, dear."

"So where are we?"

"I just climbed out of the Byzantium. You were there. So young. Didn't have a clue who I was. You're funny like that. Where are you?"

"The Doctor's dead."

"How are you doing?"

"How do you think?"

"Well, I don't know unless you tell me."

"I killed someone. Madame Kovarian, in cold blood."

"In an aborted timeline, in a world that never was."

"Yeah, but I can remember it, so it happened, so I did it. What does that make me now? I need to talk to the Doctor, but I can't now, can I?"

"If you could talk to him, would it make a difference?"

"But he's dead, so, so I can't."

"Oh, Mother, of course he isn't."

"Not for you, I suppose. You're seeing the younger versions of him running around, having adventures."

"Yeah, I am. But that's not what I mean."

"Then what do you mean?"

"Okay. I'm going to tell you what I probably shouldn't. The Doctor's last secret. Don't you want to know what he whispered in my ear?"

"He whispered his name."

"Not his name, no."

"Yes, it was. He said it was."

"Rule One?"

"The Doctor lies..."

"So do I, all the time. Have to. Spoilers. Pretending I don't know you're my mother, pretending I don't recognise a spacesuit in Florida."

"What did he whisper in your ear?"

"Oh, that man. He's always one step ahead of everyone. Always a plan."

"River, what did he tell you? River."

River told her, and the two of them danced with joy upon her hearing it.

"Hey," said her father, having arrive home. "What?"

"He's not dead. He's not dead."

"Are you sure, River? Are you really, properly sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. I'm his wife."

"Yes! And I'm his...mother-in-law..."

“Father dear, I think mummy might need another drink.”

“Yes. Yes.”

They drank together, laughed together, celebrated together, and for one night were the happiest a family could be.

A GOOD MAN GOES TO WAR

After a birthday date with the Doctor at a Frost Fair in 1814, River returned to Stormcage.

“Oh, turn it off,” she said into a guard’s phone, alarms blaring all around her. “I’m breaking in, not out. This is River Song, back in her cell. Oh, and I’ll take breakfast at the usual time. Thank you.”

She noticed a figure standing in the corridor.

“Oh, are you boys dressing up as Romans now? I thought nobody read my memos.”

“Doctor Song. It’s Rory. Sorry, have we met yet? Timestreams; I’m not quite sure where we are.”

Her father. It felt good time recognise him now. That brief time at the National Museum when she was unable to...it still unnerved her. It was good to see him now.

“Yes. Yes, we’ve met. Hello Rory.”

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s my birthday. The Doctor took me ice skating on the River Thames in 1814, the last of the great Frost Fairs. He got Stevie Wonder to sing for me under London Bridge.”

“Stevie Wonder sang in 1814?”

“Yes, he did. But you must never tell him.”

“I’ve come from the Doctor too.”

“Yes, but at a different point in time.”

“Unless there’s two of them.”

“Now, that’s a whole different birthday.”

“He needs you.”

She checked her diary. Funny, how that one day could spread so far throughout her lives. She'd been there twice now. It was her birthday now, and it was her birthday then - her first birthday.

"Demon's Run."

"How, how did you know?"

"I'm from his future. I always know. Why on Earth are you wearing that?"

"The Doctor's idea."

"Of course. His rules of engagement. Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee."

"Look ridiculous."

"Have you considered heels?"

"They've taken Amy. And our baby. The Doctor's getting some people together. We're going after her, but he needs you, too."

"I can't. Not yet, anyway."

"I'm sorry?"

"This is the Battle of Demon's Run. The Doctor's darkest hour. He'll rise higher than ever before and then fall so much further, and I can't be with him till the very end."

"Why not?"

"Because this is it. This is the day he finds out who I am."

As her father returned to Demon's Run and the revelations that awaited him, River reflected on that day. She'd been brought up in a religion that placed so much value on poetry and rhyme, and had never managed to shaken it off. She'd never really want to. There was power in religion, and there was power in poetry.

"Demons run, when a good man goes to war," she said to herself. "Night will fall and drown the sun, when a good man goes to war. Friendship dies and true love lies, night will fall and the dark will rise, when a good man goes to war. Demons run, but count the cost. The battle's won, but the child is lost."

THE ANGELS TAKE MANHATTAN

Father Octavian mightn't have been around to argue the case, but the surviving clerics turned out to have argued in River's favour quite firmly after some time after the Crash

of Byzantium had passed. At least, that's when River heard about it. It wasn't enough to get her released but, compounded with the many, many years she'd spent in Stormcage by now (her incredibly slowed growth rate did not lend itself to humane prison sentences) had seen a bit of a shift in the narrative of her imprisonment. She hoped so, at least. Escaping for adventures was one thing, but she always had to return to the prison, to maintain the lie of the Doctor's death, and in the hope that one day she'd be freed and could continue to pursue her academic career in this time.

The day of her release was abrupt. It turned out the person she was in prison for murdering had never existed. All records of him had utterly vanished, and Stormcage had no legal right to hold her any longer. She hoped her mission with the clerics, and her long, long sentence aided with the release in some sense too, to give them some meaning, but was overjoyed to take what she could get. The Doctor's digital existence being so utterly deleted played into everything she'd tried to communicate to him at Demon's Run.

Now a free woman, River resumed her studies at the Luna University, and eventually became a bona fide professor in her own right. Where once she'd got into archaeology partially for the Doctor, she'd long since developed a genuine love for it. Her academic adventures, both in the field and out of it, filled her with purpose and joy.

She maintained an active, but cautious, interest in the Weeping Angels and eventually tracked some of their activity to 1930s New York, where she adopted an appropriate alias with delight.

In the middle of an investigation in that period, in Central Park at night specifically, River bumped into her father of all people.

"He said I just went to get coffees for the Doctor and Amy. Hello River," he muttered to himself.

"Hello Dad."

"Where am I? How the hell did I get here?"

"I haven't the faintest idea, but you'll probably want to put your hands up."

Behind him a man pointed a gun in his direction. He put his hands up accordingly.

"Melody Malone?" asked another man, coming up behind River.

"You're Melody?" asked her father.

“Get in,” said the man as a limousine pulled up.

“You didn’t come here in the TARDIS, obviously,” said River as they were driven past Grand Central Station.

“Why?”

“He couldn’t have. This city’s full of time distortions. It’d be impossible to land the TARDIS here. Like trying to land a plane in a blizzard. Even I couldn’t do it.”

“So how did you get here?”

“Vortex manipulator. Less bulky than a TARDIS. A motorbike through traffic. You?”

“I’m not sure.”

Eventually they arrived at their destination, the home of crime boss and collector Julius Grayle. Looking around in the entrance hall, River spotted some artefacts of interest.

“Ah,” she said, eyeing a china vase. “Early Qin dynasty, I’d say.”

“Correct,” said Grayle. “Are you an archaeologist as well as a detective? Early Qin, just as you say. You’re very well informed.”

“And you’re very afraid. That’s an awful lot of locks for one door.”

“River, I’m translating,” said her father.

“It’s a gift of the TARDIS. It hangs around.”

“This one,” said Grayle, indicating to her father, “put him somewhere uncomfortable.”

“With the babies, sir?” asked one of his henchmen.

“Yes, why not? Give him to the babies.”

Grayle took River to his study, where she noticed the word ‘yowzah’ on one of the vases.

“Hello, sweetie. Let’s see, crime boss with a collecting fetish. Whatever you don’t let anyone else see has got to be your favourite. Or possibly your girlfriend.” She pulled open the curtains to reveal a snarling Weeping Angel clad in manacles and chains. “So, girlfriend then.”

“What are you doing?” asked Grayle as she tapped away on her vortex manipulator keypad.

“Oh, you know, texting a boy.”

“These things,” said Grayle, ignoring her and instead indicating towards the Angel, “are all over, but people don’t seem to notice. It never moves while you’re looking.”

“Oh, I know how they work.”

“So I understand. Melody Malone, the detective who investigates Angels.”

“Badly damaged.”

“I wanted to know if it could feel pain.”

“You realise it’s screaming? The others can hear. Is that why you need all the locks?”

Grayle flicked off the lights for a moment, and the Angel grabbed River’s wrist in the process.

“You’re going to tell me about these creatures. And you’re going to do it quickly.” Out went the lights again.

“The Angels are predators. They’re deadly. What do you want with them?”

“I’m a collector. What collector could resist these? I’m only human.”

“That’s exactly what they’re thinking.”

“What’s that?” asked Grayle as the lights all went out again and a very familiar wheezing, groaning noise resounded around them. “What’s happening? Is it an earthquake?”

“What is it?”

“Oh, you bad boy. You could burn New York.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means, Mr. Grayle, just you wait till my husband gets home.”

The TARDIS landed with a great thud, knocking down Grayle and breaking the Chinese vase beside him.

“Rory? Rory? Rory?” said her mother, running out of the TARDIS and up the stairs.

“Sorry I’m late honey,” said the Doctor. “Traffic was hell. Shock. He’ll be fine.”

"Not if I can get loose," said River, eyeing off Grayle.

"So, where are we now Doctor Song? How's prison?"

"Oh, I was pardoned ages ago. And it's Professor Song to you."

"Pardoned?"

"Mm. Turns out the person I killed never existed in the first place. Apparently there's no record of him. It's almost as if someone's gone around deleting himself from every database in the universe."

"You said I got too big."

"And now no one's ever heard of you. Didn't you used to be somebody?"

"Weren't you the woman who killed the Doctor?"

"Doctor who?"

"She's holding you very tight."

"At least she didn't send me back in time."

"I doubt she's strong enough."

"Well, I need a hand back, so which is it going to be? Are you going to break my wrist or hers? Oh, no. Really? Why do you have to break mine?"

"Because Amy read it in a book, and now I have no choice," said the Doctor, before looking over at her mother standing in the doorway. "You see?"

"What book?"

"Your book," said the Doctor, showing her the book with her alias sprawled across the cover, "which you haven't written yet, so we can't read."

"I see. I don't like the cover much."

"But if River's going to write that book, she'd make it useful, yeah?"

"I'll certainly try. But we can't read ahead, it's too dangerous."

"I know, but there must be something we can look at."

"What, a page of handy hints, previews, spoiler free?"

"Chapter titles."

"He's in the cellar," said the Doctor after presumably scanning the list of chapter titles.

"Gimme!"

The Doctor threw the sonic screwdriver to his mother, kissed River, and started to leave before abruptly pausing.

"Doctor? Doctor, what is it? What's wrong? Tell me. Doctor? Doctor, what is it, tell me. Okay, I know that face. Calm down. Calm down! Talk to me. Doctor!"

"No! Get your wrist out. You get your wrist out without breaking it!"

"How?"

"I don't know. Just do it. Change the future!"

He stormed out of the room. River gritted her teeth and broke her wrist getting her hand out of the Angel's grasp. She'd have to hide that from the Doctor.

She made her way down to the entrance hall, where her mother and the Doctor were talking.

"So, is this what's going to happen? We just keep chasing him and they keep pulling him further back?"

"He isn't back in time. I'm reading a displacement, but there are no temporal markers. He's been moved in space, not in time, and it's not that far from here by the look of it."

"You got out."

"So, where is he?"

"Well, come on, come on, come on, where is he?"

"If it was that easy, I'd get you to do it."

"How did you get your wrist out without breaking it?"

"You asked, I did. Problem?"

"You just changed the future."

"It's called marriage, honey. Now, hush, I'm working."

"She's good, have you noticed?" the Doctor said to her mother, not noticing River's arm hanging loosely by her side. "Really, really good."

"Ah, wherever it is, it's within a few blocks. There's a car out front. Shall we steal it?"

"Show me!" said the Doctor suddenly, noticing. He grabbed her hand and she gasped in pain. "Okay, when all those numbers on both units go to zero, that's when we've got a lock, okay? It's how we find Rory."

"Got it."

"Why did you lie to me?"

"When one's in love with an ageless god who insists on the face of a twelve year old, one does one's best to hide the damage."

"It must hurt. Come here."

"Yes. The wrist is pretty bad too."

The Doctor's hand began to glow with wisps of golden regeneration energy, which he plunged into River's hand, healing her.

"No. No. No, stop that. Stop that. Stop it!"

"There you go," he said, kissing her hand. "How's that?"

"Well, let's see, shall we?" she said, slapping his face. "That was a stupid waste of regeneration energy. Nothing is gained by you being a sentimental idiot."

"River."

"No, you embarrass me."

"River!"

She walked outside. Her mother shortly joined her.

"Okay, why did you lie?"

"Never let him see the damage. And never, ever let him see you age. He doesn't like endings."

"Got it," said the Doctor, joining them. "He's at a place called Winter Quay. The car, yes? Let's go."

They drove off in the limousine.

"Why would they send him here?" asked River. "Why not zap him back in time like they normally do?"

"We'll know that when we know what this place is."

"Winter Quay."

It was an apartment building. They rushed into the lift together.

"Rory?"

"He's close."

"Rory," she yelled, rushing into Apartment 802.

"Doctor, look at this," said River, indicating to a Weeping Angel in the corridor. "Why is it smiling?"

"Amy," he yelled, noticing the nameplate by the door adorned with her father's name.

"Rory! Get out of here! Don't look at anything. Don't touch anything!"

They rushed into Apartment 802, where her parents were looking at an old man in bed at the opposite side of the room. The man was pointing at her mother and coughing. She went over to and knelt beside him, taking his hand. River's father looked shaken as the reality that the old man was him set in.

"Rory? He's you.

"Amy," wheezed her father as he died.

"Will someone please tell me what is going on?"

"I'm sorry, Rory, but you just died. This place is policed by Angels. Every time you try to escape, you get zapped back in time."

"So this place belongs to the Angels? They built it?"

"Displacing someone back in time creates time energy, and that is what the Angels feed on. But normally, it's a one off, a hit and run. If they could keep hold of their victims, feed off their time energy over and over again. This place is a farm. A battery farm. How many Angels in New York?"

"It's like they've taken over every statue in the city."

"The Angels take Manhattan because they can, because they've never had a food source like this one. The city that never sleeps." Slow, heavy footsteps sounded outside the window.

"What was that?"

"I don't know. But I think they're coming for you."

"What does that mean? What is going to happen to me? What is physically going to happen?"

"The Angels will come for you. They'll zap you back in time to this very spot, thirty, forty years ago. And you'll live out the rest of your life in this room, until you die in that bed."

"And will Amy be there?"

"No."

"How do you know?"

"Because he was so pleased to see you again."

"Okay. Well, they haven't taken me yet. What if I just run? What if I just get the hell out of here? Then that never happens."

"It's already happened. Rory, you've just witnessed your own future."

"Doctor, he's right."

"No, he isn't."

"If Rory got out, it would create a paradox."

"What is that?" asked her mother as the footsteps kept thudding insistently.

"This is the Angels' food source. The paradox poisons the well. It could kill them all. This whole place would literally unhappen."

"It would be almost impossible."

"Loving the almost."

"But to create a paradox like that takes almost unimaginable power. What have we got, eh? Tell me. Come on, what?"

"I won't let them take him. That's what we've got."

"Whatever that thing is, it's getting closer."

"Rory, even if you got out, you'd have to keep running for the rest of your life. They would be chasing you forever."

"Well, then. Better get started," said her mother as she opened the apartment door, revealing a Weeping Angel outside. "Husband, run!"

Her parents ran past the Angels as the lights flickered.

"River, I'm not sure this can work."

"Husband, shut up."

Angels blocked the doorway. The lights continued flickering. The Doctor used his sonic screwdriver to try and keep the light on.

"We can't keep doing this."

"Any ideas?"

"Yeah, the usual - run!"

"Okay! Fire escape."

They climbed up to the roof via the fire escape, where River found her parents holding each other's arms, gazing deep into each other's eyes, standing on the edge of the building.

"What the hell are you doing?" shouted the Doctor.

"Changing the future. It's called marriage."

They jumped off the building together.

"Amy! Amy!"

Balls of energy gathered and flickered around the roof.

"Doctor, what's happening?"

"The paradox. It's working! The paradox is working!"

They were all warped to a graveyard, still in New York, the time period of her parents by the looks of it. The paradox had worked, collapsing the timeline and warping them back to where they belonged. The timelines were so scrambled the Doctor would never be able to return to that time and place. River set to repairing and cleaning the TARDIS, so

damaged from that trip to 1930s New York. He came over and helped after he'd had a talk with her parents.

"It could do with a repaint."

"I've been busy."

"Does the bulb on top need changing?"

"I just changed it."

"So. Rory and Amy, then."

"Yes. I know, I know."

"I'm just saying. They're going to get terribly bored hanging round here all day."

"Doctor."

"Ha!"

"Look, next time, could we could just go to the pub?"

"I want go to the pub right now. Are there video games there? I love video games."

"Right. Family outing, then," said River, entering the TARDIS with the Doctor to choose a destination.

"Doctor," she heard her mother shout outside shortly after.

River and the Doctor ran out of the TARDIS together, to see no sign of her father, and a Weeping Angel pointing directly at her mother.

"Where the hell did that come from?"

"It's a survivor. Very weak, but keep your eyes on it."

"Where's Rory?"

A nearby gravestone read 'In Loving Memory - Rory Arthur Williams - Aged 82'.

"I'm sorry. Amelia, I'm so, so sorry."

"No. No, we can just go and get him in the TARDIS. One more paradox."

"Would rip New York apart."

"No, that's not true. I don't believe you."

"Mother, it's true."

"Amy, what are you doing?"

"That gravestone, Rory's, there's room for one more name, isn't there?"

"What are you talking about? Back away from the Angel. Come back to the TARDIS. We'll figure something out."

"The Angel, would it send me back to the same time? To him?"

"I don't know. Nobody knows."

"But it's my best shot, yeah?"

"No!"

"Doctor, shut up. Yes. Yes, it is."

"Amy."

"Well, then. I just have to blink, right?"

"No!"

"It'll be fine. I know it will. I'll be with him, like I should be. Me and Rory together. Melody?"

"Stop it. Just, just stop it!"

River took her mother's hand and kissed it.

"You look after him. You be a good girl, and you look after him."

"You are creating fixed time. I will never be able to see you again."

"I'll be fine. I'll be with him."

"Amy, please, just come back into the TARDIS. Come along, Pond, please."

"Raggedy man, goodbye!"

Amy turned her back to the Angel and vanished. The gravestone gained three more lines - 'And His Loving Wife - Amelia Williams - Aged 87'.

“No!” cried the Doctor.

Back in the TARDIS, River operated the controls while the Doctor reeled.

“River, they were your parents. I'm sorry, I didn't think.”

“It doesn't matter.”

“Of course it matters.”

“What matters is this. Doctor, don't travel alone.”

“Travel with me, then.”

“Whenever and wherever you want. But not all the time. One psychopath per TARDIS, don't you think? Okay. This book I've got to write. Melody Malone. I presume I send it to Amy to get it published?”

“Yes. Yes.”

“I'll tell her to write an afterword. For you. Maybe you'll listen to her.”

River left him alone.

“The last page!” she heard him cry out a moment later.

He found that afterword she'd tell her mother to write, and it seemed to settle him a tiny amount. But he needed time to grieve. So did she, in a way.

She'd be able to get to the right time to send the manuscript to her mother, but her and the Doctor's timelines were so tangled in today's series of events that she wouldn't be able to get into the city itself. Not without risking temporal calamity at least, and after the damage to time she'd caused on her wedding day, and what the Doctors had told her about the Time War, that was not something she wanted to risk for anyone else anymore. If things were simpler, she could just use her vortex manipulator to slip back into 1930s New York to see her parents again, and let the Doctor borrow it and travel that way sans TARDIS to see them again too, but things were too complicated, too dangerous, and she wasn't willing to risk the life together her parents had secured. Some memory of Mels buzzed in the back of her head as well, something about 1930s New York perhaps, but she couldn't bring it to the surface. Strange.

One psychopath per TARDIS - she'd have loved to travel with the Doctor full-time, so to speak, but now wasn't the time. He was in such an unstable state. They loved each other, they were husband and wife, but she knew they didn't always bring out the best in each other, especially when both of them were in a state like this. She couldn't be his

conscience; she was more like to be the devil on his shoulder than the angel, and that was not what he needed now. It tore at her to leave him like this but he needed someone else, someone not like her, right now. How could she be the voice of reason for him, when she was the one more likely to go off the same rails? She loved him, and that meant doing what was best for him, even if it hurt the both of them. And so they left each other to grieve.

RAIN GODS

Some time later, River encountered an older version of her Doctor that seemed to have bounced back from her parent's demise well enough. He'd dropped the tweed and suspenders for a more mature outfit, with a lovely purple coat and pocketwatch. The Doctor tried to take her on a date to some restaurant he assured her she'd love when they'd accidentally arrived somewhere else. They'd soon found themselves embarrassingly captured by the native population, on the so-called planet of the 'Rain Gods'.

"Okay, so tell me you have a plan," River said to the Doctor.

"Eh? Why do I have to have a plan? You could have a plan. I chose the restaurant."

"Yes, and accidentally took us to the planet of the Rain Gods, where we're now being sacrificed. Plan!"

"Okay, plan is...we need to distract them with something before they actually sacrifice us to the Rain Gods. Then, when they're distracted, we run away."

"That's not a plan; that's just hoping!"

"Hey, it's a start. Can you smell something?"

"Why are they sacrificing us to the Rain Gods anyway?"

"Appease their wrath. Apparently it's very good for the crops, you know. Sacrificing. There is actually some scientific evidence-"

"Oh, so you're in favour of being burnt alive?"

"Just looking on the bright side dear," he said, before the rumbling of thunder above interrupted them. "Hey, hey, and there it is! Oi! If there are any Rain Gods up there, you're rubbish! Strike my dead if I'm wrong."

"What are you doing?"

“Smelling the ozone dear. Down,” he said, crouching down as more thunder rumbled.
“Oh dear...”

“Sweetie...”

“Ah,” he said, leaping up with an umbrella as rain became to pour down. “Ha, ha, ha, eh? River...run! Ah, by the way, I think the Rain Gods are gonna do that again you know!”

“That was your plan?” River asked as they ran off together into the TARDIS.

“Well, it worked, didn’t it?”

“Basically, you hoped for lightning. That was it?”

“And here we are.”

“We should be burning at the stake right now. It’s lucky for you you’re pretty.”

“You were in no danger. I knew something would come up.”

“No, you didn’t!”

“I did! I promise I did!”

River laughed, realising putting her faith into the Doctor had paid off yet again.

THE DIARY OF RIVER SONG | DOOM COALITION

After a set of adventures alone, River found herself to inspired to invent some gadgetry for herself. Her father had stressed the importance of trowels to her a few times, something apparently passed down by his father, and something she certainly agreed with given her line of work. She’d gone one step further though, and invented a sonic trowel.

Oh, she’d made a sort of sonic screwdriver for herself as well, but it was an imitation, as she really had no idea how the Doctor’s worked as it did. For basic purposes it did fine, but the trowel had a bit more sentimental value, so she found herself using that more.

Archaeological work in the future had led her to the upsetting discovery of a planet that all the evidence pointed towards being the site of the Doctor’s ultimate death; Trenzalore. She avoided learning more about that with all her might, travelling back to the 20th century to plunge herself into writing archaeological theses in relatively early Earthen academia.

A mysterious, unknown tomb being located shook her back into her adventuring ways, and she explored the crypt with a British Consul by the name of Bertie Potts. Her next adventure happened to involve him as well, as River became embroiled in the intrigue of a marvellous party she went to.

After that, she went on the trail of mysterious, planet-killing SporeShips that nobody had any idea as to the origin or purpose of. That adventure was a particularly memorable one that very much did not go as expected, and ending in her setting off after the so-called 'Rulers of the Universe' that had been plaguing her lately. During her confrontation with them, she found herself aided over an audio communications channel by another ship containing...the Doctor. A younger one, one of the ones her roguish Doctor had marked a cross on the photo of. The Byronic one.

Well, they were only communicating by radio, he didn't see her and she didn't see him, so there was no need for any memory erasure. When River had concluded that adventure, the ease with which interacting with another Doctor had come inspired her to start seeking his past faces out more freely.

River had many, many adventures with many, many of the Doctor's faces after this. The short one with the umbrella proved infuriating, the first Doctor she had very little patience for. The curly-haired one with the striking fashion sense proved very, very alluring, and River enjoyed quite a bit of time with him. She had some adventures with the Byronic one in the flesh, where she'd employed a psychic wimple to disguise herself as an entirely different-looking woman, a nun in fact, calling herself Melody Malone. These adventures involved the Time Lords and the burgeoning rise of a group called the Doom Coalition - more and more, River found herself tied up in the Doctor's past.

The young blond one, the wonderful Bohemian one, on and on their adventures continued. River even managed to wrap herself up in adventures with multiple faces of the Doctor's nemesis, the Master.

Over time she managed to piece together the order of the Doctors, even the aberrations he didn't like to talk about, and understand that her boyish Doctor was the final one in the chain.

She always came back to him.

LAST NIGHT

On one date with that Doctor, they'd decided to have a quick stopover on the planet Calderon Beta, which they'd visited previously, before moving onto the main event of the

night - the Singing Towers of Darrilium, where he'd been promising to take her for quite some time. He always seemed to get distracted and take her somewhere else though.

As they both went off separately for a brief time to investigate their surroundings, River found the TARDIS strangely parked nearby her, when it had previously been further away. Was he feeling that clingy today? How sweet.

"You just can't keep away, can you?" she asked, entering the TARDIS, where she noticed a dress identical to the one she was wearing hanging up inside. "Doctor? Why have you brought another one of these? Who else is here?"

"River, could you check the light on top?" the Doctor responded. "I think the bulb needs changing."

"The bulb?" she asked, walking outside and checking it, then returning. "The light's fine, I don't know what you're talking about..."

Another Doctor, with the same face, rushed into the TARDIS.

"No River! Wrong TARDIS! I'm parked around back...younger version."

"Two of you!" she exclaimed. "The mind races, does it not?"

"Come on, we'll be late," said the Doctor she'd come with.

"He's taking me to the Singing Towers of Darillium!" she told the other Doctor inside.

"He's been promising for ages!"

Well, that ended up as a bust, as he changed his mind, put off that date, and took her entirely somewhere else. It seemed Darillium was still a long way off.

THE HUSBANDS OF RIVER SONG

In 5343, on the human colony planet of Mendorax Dellora, River married King Hydroflax, the Butcher of the Bone Meadows.

He'd been badly wounded following a raid on the Halassi Vaults, where the most valuable diamond of the universe had found its way buried into his skull. She'd made an arrangement with the Halassi to retrieve the diamond, and an arrangement with a client onboard the cruiseship Harmony and Redemption to sell the diamond, for one hundred billion credits.

She'd posed as a nurse and seduced Hydroflax into marrying her. Her employee Nardole and her other husband Ramone had helped her with the logistics of the scheme.

She hadn't seen the Doctor for a very long time by this point. She wasn't quite sure what had happened. She'd continued her adventures with past Doctors for quite a while, but not being able to sustain an actual relationship with any, what with the constant memory erasure and disguises and all, became tiresome. Worse, her diary was very nearly full, from meetings with the Doctors that could actually remember her. Her Time Lord DNA meant she still had a long, long life ahead of her, but the lack of pages remaining in her diary told her that very little of it would feature the Doctor anymore. It wasn't like they only had one or two adventures left or anything, but there wasn't an endless line of meetings with him waiting to happen anymore. Perhaps a dozen more. Maybe less, maybe more, depending on how much detail their diary entries required.

It did depress her. The further away from him she got, the more he felt like the distant, lonely god he sometimes fashioned himself as, and less like her husband. For all their adventures together, for all that they were married, they'd never really had any actual domestic bliss together. Nothing longer than a few nights. She'd grown very resigned about that fact.

But, she had other husbands (and wives, one even an archaeologist like her), and many more adventures to have, and so she was knee-deep in scheming on Mendorax Dellora. She'd sent Nardole out to find a surgeon she'd requested to help address the matter of Hydroflax's head. Eventually he arrived at the entrance to the flying saucer she'd commandeered, accompanied by some man she'd never seen before in her life.

"Come on," Nardole said to that man.

"Well, you took your time," River said to Nardole.

"Sorry ma'am," he said, bowing, and indicating to the man beside him. "This is him. This is the surgeon."

"Hello," said the surgeon. He was very handsome, a nice mature age, and almost looked a bit like a magician. That was disappointing - he barely looked anything like his pictures, and in this line of work, River didn't like surprises.

"You don't look much like your pictures."

"Well, that's an ongoing problem for me."

“Doesn't look very impressive, does he? Nardole, what have you brought to my doorstep?”

“I've had a haircut. This is my best suit.”

“It's not even a suit.”

“Do I know you?”

“You most certainly do not,” she said, throwing back her hood and revealing herself, to which the surgeon smiled. “And now that you've met me, you'll do your very best to forget me.”

“River!”

“Oi! Doctor Song to you. Sometimes Professor, but mainly Doctor.”

“Don't use my name. Ever. How do you know me?”

“Well, it's a tiny bit complicated. People usually need a flowchart.”

“It doesn't matter. If either of you use my name again, I will remove your organs in alphabetical order. Any questions?”

“Which alphabet?” he asked before his grin faded. “Sorry, you really didn't want these questions, did you?”

“This way,” said River, leading them into the saucer. “We don't have a lot of time.”

“What seems to be the problem?”

“My husband.”

“Your husband?”

“Didn't you read my message? My husband, yes. My husband is dying.”

“Something wrong?” Nardole asked the surgeon, who had stopped in his tracks, looking mightily disconcerted.

“I think I'm going to need a bigger flowchart.”

Inside the saucer's chamber, Hydroflax awaited care, surrounded by hooded guards.

“Husband, I return to you.”

"Where is my queen?"

"Never far from you, my love."

"Ah."

"No, wait - that's your husband?"

"Listen, you are being watched by four billion people," said River, indicating to the screens displaying those very people, recessed into the walls around the chamber. "You are surrounded by warrior monks with sentient laser swords, genetically engineered anger problems and not enough to do. Best just stay still and keep your hands by your side."

"No, wait. That's your husband?"

"My husband, your patient. King Hydroflax."

"Yes, that's who you're married to? Not anybody else?"

"My love, attend me, woman!"

"I fly to you," she said to Hydroflax, before turning a sharp look to the surgeon. "Is there a problem?"

"Right. So you don't recognise me, then?"

"Why would I recognise you?"

"Oh, no reason."

"My one true love," she said to Hydroflax, caressing his armour. "The only husband I will ever have. My time with you has been too short."

"You have given me days of adventure and many nights of passion. The end is near. I feel it."

"Forgive me, my lord. I have acted against your instructions."

"My love?"

"If you die this day, this galaxy will drown any tears. Oh, look at them, your people! They watch and hope and pray. With so much at stake, I followed my heart. I disobeyed your orders and sent for the finest surgeon in the galaxy! surgeon, attend your patient."

The surgeon walked up to Hydroflax, while the crowds on the screens continued to cheer.

“Bow.”

“Sorry, what?”

“You are in the presence of his Infinite Majesty, King Hydroflax. You will bow.”

“Oh, no. I'm sorry, Your Majesty, I can't do that.”

“You what?”

“It's my back.”

“Your back?”

“Yeah, my back's playing up. It simply refuses to carry the weight of an entirely pointless stratum of society who contribute nothing of worth to the world and crush the hopes and dreams of working people.”

“Can you save me, surgeon?” asked Hydroflax.

“Well, that depends upon what's wrong with you.”

“There's something in his brain.”

“You could have fooled me. Oh, oh, sorry.”

Rivec placated Hydroflax, most perturbed by that remark, by massaging his face vigorously.

“Sorry, just gallows humour. Probably the wrong word.”

“My love, you must rest. The surgeon and I will discuss the procedure. Prepare, master of my life, to live anew. She kissed Hydroflax's forehead, then addressed the crowds.

“Patience be with you all. Our King will rise again!”

“Our King will rise again.”

She gestured for the surgeon to follow her out of the chamber, into another room of the saucer.

“All right,” said the surgeon, “enough of this. The joke's over.”

“What joke?”

"Look at me."

"Why?"

"I'm the doctor."

"You'd better be, you've got an operation to perform," she said, activating a great big hologram of Hydroflax's head. "Here's the entry wound, just below the hairline. And there's the projectile. It should have killed him straight off, but he's very strong."

"It's not a bullet."

"It's a diamond."

"How did it get in there?"

"At speed."

The surgeon put on a pair of sunglasses and peered carefully at the hologram.

"Do you recognise it?"

"No!"

"Yes."

"The Halassi Androvar."

"The very same. Hydroflax was leading a raid on the Halassi vaults. In the ensuing fire-fight, the whole thing blew up in his face, with the result that he now has the most valuable diamond in the universe lodged three inches inside his enormous head. So, can you remove it?"

"It's very small. It might be difficult to manoeuvre it."

"Not the diamond. His head."

"His head?" the surgeon asked, removing his sunglasses and staring at River.

"Yes. I think it would be easier just to remove the whole thing, don't you?"

"Wouldn't that kill him?"

"You're the medical expert, but I'd say so, yes."

"Your husband?"

“Sort of.”

“Sort of?”

“I basically married the diamond. The Halassi want their diamond back, so they came to me.”

“Why?”

“I’m an archaeologist.”

“Slash murderer slash thief.”

“An archaeologist is just a thief with patience,” she said, emptying out a zippered bag containing a red fez and a bronze plate. “Never had much of that. It’ll fit in here, don’t you think? I’ve checked it for leaks.”

“Is this what you’re like when I’m not-”

“Not what?”

“You’re talking about murdering someone.”

“No, I’m not. I’m actually murdering someone. Cheer up, get a saw, I’ll kill the lights, you kill the patient. I employed you. You agreed to this. Do you not know who that man is? King Hydroflax, the butcher of the Bone Meadows, who ends his battles by eating his enemies, dead or alive. The murder of a creature like that wouldn’t weigh heavily on my conscience, even if I had one. What’s that face? Are you thinking? Stop it. You’re a man, it looks weird.”

“I need more information.”

“For what?”

“For my diagnosis.”

“He’s dying. We’re about to steal his head and scoop out his brains. Aren’t we overthinking?”

“I’ll be the judge of that. I’m the doctor.”

“You know who you remind me of?”

“Yes, probably a chap with a big-”

“My second wife,” River said, thinking of Benny.

The hologram of Hydroflax's head was then replaced by the entire actual Hydroflax entering the room. The monks with him all draw their swords.

"Darling! You're up and about!"

"False wife!"

"How much better you're looking!"

"You plan to take my head."

"Never crossed my mind. Is this your bag?" she pushed the bag towards the surgeon.

"Perhaps you should have just asked," said Hydroflax, pulling his head out of his red, now more obviously mechanical body.

"Well! I wondered why we didn't share a bathroom."

"You married a cyborg and you didn't even know it."

"I'll have you flogged and flayed and burnt. I will crush every last remnant of you from this universe."

"How dare you! I'm your wife."

"You planned to murder me!"

"Don't change the subject."

"Why are you doing this? Who are you?"

"I'm Professor River Song. You have an ancient artefact of great value to good people, and whatever it takes, I'm going to bring it home to them. You have stolen so much from so many, King Hydroflax, and I'm the woman who's going to steal it all back."

"What are you?"

"I'm an archaeologist. Look! I've got a trowel," she said, whipping out her sonic trowel.

"Do not harm her," said the surgeon, picking up Hydroflax's head. "If you know what's good for you, do not lay a finger on that woman."

"Ignore him. Attack!"

River went for the red cyborg body with the sonic trowel while the surgeon readied the garbage disposal.

“Garbage disposal, right? Get ready to say whee!”

“Put me down.”

“Back off from River Song. Give the order now. Get yourself under control.”

“Do not attack the female.”

River ran to the surgeon’s side, grabbing the bag, and pointing her trowel at Hydroflax’s head.

“Nobody move, or the head gets it”

“Do you really have a shooty trowel?”

“It’s sonic.”

“Sonic trowel. You realise how ridiculous that sounds?”

“Their threats are empty. Destroy them!”

“Negative,” said the cyborg body, lights flashing on its torso as it spoke. “Seventy-eight percent chance of significant tissue damage.”

“Do as you’re told!”

“Decision overruled. Recommendation, chill.”

“Look at that, your body’s got a mind of its own.”

“More like an onboard computer for the cybernetic component.”

“Plus in-built flash drive and vernacular friendly interface.”

“Cyber co-pilot.”

“Mobile life support.”

“Sexy.”

“It’s not sexy.”

“Absolutely sexy.”

“Why is everything sexy now?”

“Speaking of which,” said River, activating her communications unit, “Ramone, prep for emergency extraction. Two to go.”

“Standing by for teleport,” he replied over the interface.

“Put it in the bag,” River told the surgeon.

“Sorry?”

“The head. Put it in the bag.”

“Do not put me in the bag.”

“Quickly, do it. Ramone, twenty seconds to jump.”

“I will not be placed into a bag!”

“Stop shouting a minute if you want to go face-up,” said the surgeon, placing the head into the bag.

“You will be crushed! You will be destroyed! You will beg my infinite mercy!”

“Oh, zip it,” River told Hydroflax, as the surgeon zipped up the bag, before turning to address the guards. “Try to follow me and I’ll put him in a blender. Ramone, now.”

They were teleported back onto the planet surface, where they materialised two feet above the ground, which they promptly hit with a thump.

“Ramone! Just once, can you get the height right?”

“Sorry, Professor”

“When I escape,” came a voice from the bag, “I will bring terror to you and your family. There is no escape from the-”

“Home in on my signal. Get a shift on. Can you locate the Damsel?”

“I’m on it. The capsule is really close.”

The surgeon was lying back on the snow, laughing.

“Is something funny?”

“Who dares laugh at Hydroflax? You shall be crushed! You shall scream in fear! Let me out of this bag!”

"This is a serious mission in a critical phase. There is nothing to laugh about here."

"We're being threatened by a bag! By a head in a bag!"

"I shall make dust of you. My enemies are meat for the devouring!"

"I can't approve of any of this, you know, but I haven't laughed in a long time."

"Well, good for you."

"Prepare to die in agony and submit to my supremacy! Unzip this bag!"

River laughed along with the surgeon.

"You know, don't you?"

"Know what?"

"Stop pretending. You know who I am."

"Who are you?"

"You know who I am. It's, it's, it's me."

"Great. Who are you?"

Ramone came running up to them.

"Professor Song! Sorry, Professor. Sorry about the height thing."

"Prove it," she said before kissing him, long and hard.

"Doesn't it get dull after a while?" said the surgeon with disgust. "As an activity, it's not hugely varied, is it?"

"I'm so sorry. This is my husband, Ramone."

"Another one? Are you going to kill him, too?"

"We're not actually married."

"Ah, we are, in fact. I wiped it from your memory."

"Why?"

"Well, you were being annoying. So, the Damsel. Do we have a fix?"

"Found the capsule just over in the village, but I can't locate Damsel. I've looked everywhere."

"Who's Damsel?"

"Have you been thorough? It's not easy, you know. He does have twelve faces."

Ramone took out her wallet, where a sheaf of photographs dropped down - the Doctors, in the order she'd managed to piece together in her adventures with them.

"None of these men are here. Are you sure it's one of these?"

"Yes! He only has these twelve faces. He'll be around here somewhere. This is the closest intersection with the Doctor's timeline. That's why I crashed Hydroflax's ship here."

"Damsel..." said the surgeon.

"Codename, Damsel in Distress. Apparently, he needs a lot of rescuing."

"What if he has a face that you don't know about yet?"

"He has limits. Well, then, let's go find him."

Down in the nearby village, River and Ramone walked through the streets, while the surgeon tagged along behind them, carrying the zippered bag.

"What if we can't find him?" Ramone asked. "We need to get you off-world now."

"Off-world," scoffed the surgeon. "People never say that. Are you new?"

"We can't hang around waiting. He could be ages."

"Yes, he's probably off rebuilding a civilisation or defeating giant robot fish"

They came to the end of the street, where the TARDIS stood. So, one of him was around here after all.

"We'll just have to steal it."

"From the ninth dimension - sorry, what?"

"The hopper is really close. We would be out of here in less than ten minutes."

"I need time travel, I need this TARDIS," said River. Her vortex manipulator was in for repairs, the kind she couldn't manage on her own.

"I'm sorry. The word steal. Somebody said steal.

"Yes. We're going to steal this box. Hush, you wouldn't understand."

"You can't."

"Why can't I?"

"You can't just steal a...a box."

"Why not?"

"Look, it says Police."

"I have a key," she said, brandishing her key and opening the door.

"Okay. This, er, Damsel person. He sounds, he sounds pretty dangerous-ish."

:It's a time machine. I can take it, do whatever I want for as long as I like and pop it back a second later. He'll never know it was gone."

"Yes, he will."

"How?"

"He'll just know."

"Well, he's never noticed before."

"Maybe he'll notice now."

"I'll see you on Temple Beach," River laughed, before kissing Ramone. "I've already picked out your swimwear."

"Okay, but be careful."

"Absolutely not. You, with me. Bring the head," she said, entering the TARDIS. Before the surgeon entered, she popped her head back out the door. "Before you come in, you'd better prepare yourself for a shock. It's not as snug as it looks."

"Oh. My, God!" proclaimed the surgeon as he entered the TARDIS. "Oh, it's bigger!:

"Well, yes."

"On the inside-"

"We need to concentrate."

“-than it is-”

“I know where you're going with this, but I need you to calm down.”

“-on the outside!”

“You've certainly grasped the essentials.”

“My entire understanding of physical space has been transformed! Three-dimensional Euclidean geometry has been torn up, thrown in the air and snogged to death! My grasp of the universal constants of physical reality has been changed forever.”

“Would you like a drink?” River asked, opening a roundel to reveal a drinks compartment. “Aldebaran brandy. Help yourself, but don't tell dad.”

An insistent beeping began to resound inside the TARDIS.

“What's that noise?”

“It seems to have powered down, conserving batteries. It's an in-built life-support system. I'm not sure what powers it, but-”

“I really don't care. What's that noise?”

“I don't know. A signal? Distress call?”

“Homing beacon.”

“Possibly.”

“So the rest of him is coming?”

“He must be very cross. He's lost his head.”

“Time we were off, then,” said River, trying and failing to get the TARDIS to dematerialise.

“You're doing it wrong.”

“I am certainly not.”

“Not those levers.”

“Hush.”

“You probably want to press that button.”

“Why? That evacuates the waste tank on deck seven.”

“Does it?”

“What is wrong with you?” River asked over the surgeon’s mutterings. “Something’s interfering with the engines, which is technically not possible.”

“Maybe.”

“How would you know?”

“Maybe the engines are interfering with themselves. Wild theory, but what if this machine had certain safeguards. For instance, maybe it can’t take off when a life form registers as being both inside and outside at the same time?”

“Head and body.”

“Which would mean, and again, I’m just, I’m just wildly theorising here, that’s the door would not engage properly.”

“Of course. It can’t seal the real-time envelope.”

“Hence it can’t take off. Not when someone is in and out at the same time. I mean, that just wouldn’t be good manners, would it?”

“You’re very quick.”

“Yes. For a doctor.”

“Yes.”

“Seriously?” asked the surgeon, before rolling his eyes and taking Hydroflax’s head from the bag. “It’s signalling. We have to assume the body is homing in on this.”

“So, how do we stop it?”

“Well, we could chop its head off. Oh, look.”

“Does sarcasm help?”

“Wouldn’t it be a great universe if it did?”

“So, summing up. It’s coming, we can’t take off, we can’t seal the doors.”

“Yep.”

“So we just kill the head, right?”

“You can't shoot the head in the face!”

“Why not?”

Hydroflax opened his eyes and shouted. The surgeon dropped him, face-down.

“Go on, then, tell him to put his hands up.”

“Do not fire if you value your lives.”

“Why, what are you going to do?”

“Kill me, and my body will burn.”

“Burn what?”

“This world!”

“Suppose we believe you. How?”

“My body contains a split quantum actualiser.”

“A perpetually stabilised black hole. That's your power source.”

“What sort of medical school did you go to?”

“A really good one for doctors.”

“More than a power source. If necessary, a bomb.”

“So you could wipe out this solar system.”

“It wouldn't be the first.”

“It would be your last.”

“A fitting end for the glory of Hydroflax.”

“So, why haven't you threatened this before?”

“A king does not endanger his people for no reason.”

“You're endangering them now.”

“I'm cross.”

“Doctor Song, are you there?” came Ramone’s voice from outside the TARDIS door as he knocked on it insistently. “I have a message for you.”

“Ramone! Get in here!”

Hydroflax’s red cyborg body opened the door...with Ramone’s head atop it.

“Ah!”

“You’re going to die!” cried Ramone, as he - it? - grabbed River, lifting her off the floor.

“Kill her,” said Hydroflax.

“No!” said Ramone.

“Put her down,” said the surgeon.

“Kill her now!” repeated Hydroflax.

“Death initiating,” said the cyborg body.

“I’m so sorry.”

The surgeon ducked past the cyborg suit and closed the TARDIS doors. Immediately, the time rotor started moving, and the TARDIS began to shake. The cyborg suit dropped River.

“I’m sorry!”

“Stop them! Stop them!”

“Where are we going?”

“Get the hell out!”

“Stop them!”

“Death initiating.”

“You set the coordinates, where for?”

“Just get the damn head!”

“Kill them! Destroy them!” yelled Hydroflax, as River grabbed the zippered bag. “Kill them!”

“Here,” said River, throwing the bag to the surgeon, who scooped Hydroflax into it before throwing it back to River.

“With me.”

She ran out the TARDIS doors, which had materialised in the baggage hold of Harmony and Redemption.

“Where are we?” asked the surgeon, joining her.

“This way, come on.”

“What about the box? Stop holding my hand, people don't do that to me.”

“Hush now.”

“Don't hush me. I'm not a hushing person.”

They made their way into the reception area, a lovely marble-floored place filled with aliens of all sorts, unified by their dinner jackets and posh frocks. Long staircases ran up the outer hull to the upper decks. Now this was comfort.

“We are currently cruising at warp factor twelve,” chimed the ship's computer.

“Traversing the fourth galaxy of our seven galaxy cruise. Next is the Andromeda galaxy. Supernova approaching now to starboard.”

Flemming, the blue catfish-like client she'd liaised with quite a few times by now, walked up to them.

“Ah, Doctor Song. Your table is ready.”

“Flemming! How are the twins?”

“Still digesting their mother, thank you for asking.”

“I'm sure it was a lovely ceremony.”

“Oh, there were tears. And just a hint of screaming,” said Fleming, to which they both laughed.

“Er, Fleming, I wonder, could you deadlock seal the baggage hold for me?”

“It's a little irregular. The other passengers might want access.”

“Do you remember that time I was transporting dragon eggs?”

“Consider it done. Is the gentleman here for dinner?”

“Yes, he is,” said River, looking at the surgeon.

“Excellent! I'll have the chef prepare him immediately.”

“No, you won't.”

“Er, he will in fact be joining me to eat.”

“I was about to suggest that force-feeding might be required. This way. Oh, may I take your bag?”

“Oh, no, no, no, no. That's fine, thanks.”

“Sorry,” said the surgeon, loud enough to cover up the muffling sounds emanating from the bag. “It was my stomach. I have an irritable bowel. It's having a day.”

“This way,” said Flemming.

“Here,” said River, throwing the bag to the surgeon. “I don't suppose you mind if I freshen up.”

She proceeded to squirt a spray at her head. Golden energy pinned up her hair, then transformed her clothes into an evening dress with a golden sequined bodice.

“Not bad for two hundred, eh?” she said.

“Two hundred?”

“I have an augmented lifespan. Long story.”

“So,” said the surgeon as they made their way into the dining room, “what's the occasion?”

“I've got the diamond. Now it's time to sell it.”

“I thought you were returning it to the Halassi?”

“Tell me, were you born boring, or did you have to work at it?”

“Where did you find a buyer?”

“Look around you. The starship Harmony And Redemption, minimum ticket price one billion credits, plus the provable murder of multiple innocent life forms. Suites are reserved for planet-burners. Thank you,” she said as she took a drink from a passing

waiter. "Even the staff are required to have a verifiable history of indiscriminate slaughter. This is where genocide comes to kick back and relax. Do try the fish."

A few moments later, at their table, River thumbed through her diary.

"Why are you frowning?" she asked.

"How did you know?"

"It's audible."

"Deadlock seals can be broken."

"By geniuses. Hydroflax has a brain the size of a pea and it's currently under the table," she said, punctuating her point by kicking the bag. "He's gone back to sleep, I think."

"You married him, though."

"I told you, I married the diamond."

"How?"

"I posed as his nurse. Took me a week."

"To fall in love?" asked the surgeon, eyeing her diary.

"It's the easiest lie you can tell a man. They'll automatically believe any story they're the hero of."

"River, there's er, there's something I should probably tell you."

"Doctor Song," interrupted a waitress, "your guest has docked. He should be with you in a very few minutes."

"Thank you. Whenever he's ready."

"Of course."

"What's the book?"

"Oh, it's my diary. One should always have something sensational to read on a spaceship."

"Is it sad?"

"Why would a diary be sad?"

"I don't know. It's just that you look sad."

"It's nearly full."

"So?"

"The man who gave me this was the sort of man who'd know exactly how long a diary you were going to need."

"He sounds awful."

"I suppose he is. I've never really thought about it," she said, putting the diary back in her clutch purse.

"Not somebody special then?"

"No," River lied. "But terribly useful every now and then."

"So, who is this buyer?"

"No idea, he just responded to the advert."

A shadow fell across their table as a bald man with a massive scar covering his face joined them.

"Which of you is Song?"

"Who wants to know?"

"I am Scratch."

"Don't need your name. Are you empowered to purchase?"

"I represent the Shoal of the Winter Harmony."

"Don't care. Don't want to know. I'll need immediate payment. Can you do that?"

"And could you either sit down or fetch us the wine list or something?"

"You have the diamond?" Scratch asked in his off-putting hoarse voice as he sat down.

"Of course I have the diamond. Show me the money."

Scratch ran his finger along his scar and something unlocked. Then he pulled his head open with an awful squelching sound.

"Just a thought, you probably shouldn't do that in a restaurant."

He continued, removing a metal globe from the grey contents of his skull. He placed it on a napkin River held out. Thin strands of gunk were still attached to it. He closed his head again.

“Once instructed, this will transfer the necessary funds to whatever account you choose.”

“Thank you.”

“The diamond.”

“You're going to have to dig for it a bit,” said River as she placed the zippered bag on the table, “but somehow I don't think that's going to be a problem for you.”

“Is this a deception?” Scratch asked, now standing.

“No. The diamond is in there. This is a public place, there won't be any tricks.”

“This is not a public place.”

The other diners turned around. River saw now that they were all the same species as Scratch.

“Block booking. That's clever.”

“You needn't have bothered. I've brought what you want. Please do assume that I have also taken precautions, and don't do anything that might make me cross and kill you.”

“Statement accepted. The diamond is here?”

The other diners hissed.

“The payment, then.”

River handed the globe to Scratch, who opened it and tapped various illuminated buttons.

“One hundred billion credits, as we agreed,” he said, handing the globe back to River.

“This accesses all the banks in the galaxy.”

“Thank you. Here you go, then. You may need to use a spoon or knitting needle or something.”

“Be it known, we do not do this for ourselves.”

"I really don't care."

"We do it in honour of our distant and loving King, who once visited our world in blood and joy."

"Well, isn't that lovely?" said River, humouring him as she started to unzip the bag.

"We honour thee, we prostrate ourselves in your name, Hydroflax."

"Hydroflax!" shouted the rest of the diners.

"For love of thee, we do this thing today. Hydroflax."

"Hydroflax!" chanted the other diners, now standing as well. "Hydroflax! Hydroflax! Hydroflax!"

River zipped up the bag.

"Give it. Give us the treasure."

"Hydroflax! Hydroflax! Hydroflax!"

"What is wrong?"

"Er, well, er. Awkward."

"Why do you delay? We have paid, we will receive."

"Yes, you will," said the surgeon as he sprang up and grabbed the bag. "Of, by jingo, you will, yes, of course. But obviously, we have to, you know, er, check some..."

"Things."

"Things. There are things that have to be checked before I get it to you. If we don't check the thing, then the, the..."

"We will receive!"

"Yes, you will receive, and here it is. Now, on its way, over this small distance."

"We will receive!"

"Here you go," said the surgeon, accordingly giving Scratch the bag, "and you can have the bag as well."

"You know, it's been lovely, but er, we don't want to intrude on this special moment, so why don't we just leave you with the new baby?"

"You will remain."

"Is that strictly necessary?"

"I do not like surprises."

"Well, it's going to be a funny old day. Oh, boy," said the surgeon, panicking as Scratch started to unzip the bag. "You know what? I just can't stand idly by and let this continue."

He snatched the bag back from Scratch, as the diners eyed him off.

"Death has been done this day! Noble blood has been spilled, and our tears will surely follow. The sky shall crack, the ground shall heave, and even the rocks and the stones shall weep their rage. Behold! The head of Hydroflax!"

The surgeon bent down, took the head out of the bag and showed it to the diners, who hissed in response.

"Rest now, sweet prince. Walk amongst us nevermore. Shall we start the bidding at two hundred billion? I'm sorry, Professor Song, but we really couldn't keep this treasure from the truly devout."

"Oh, my apologies to the truly devout," said River, joining in.

"And shall we find out who is the most truly devout?"

"This is heresy!"

"Two hundred over there," said River, pointing to a bewildered man at the back.

"Two hundred fifty million by the sweet trolley," said the surgeon, pointing towards another random attendee.

"Silence! This is not our way."

"Well, it doesn't say much for your king if you can't put a price on his head. Let us see what the king himself has to say," said the surgeon, jabbing a knife into the head's left ear, waking up Hydroflax. The diners prostrated themselves, as Hydroflax screamed.

"Quick," yelled River, grabbing the surgeon's hand and running for the door, where Flemming blocked them.

“Professor Song! Has the food disappointed you?”

The red cyborg body stomped in behind them, and the diners screamed and ran away. Security men in black berets grabbed River and the surgeon.

“At last,” said Hydroflax, “I am whole again. Come to me, my body.”

The body did so, scanning Hydroflax’s head.

“Well? Put me back.”

“Scan in progress.”

“You don’t need to scan me, just put me back.”

“Tissue deterioration now irreversible.”

“Well, what are you going to do about that?”

“Additional, the projectile inside your brain continues to move. Prognosis, death in seven minutes.”

“Well, I refuse. King Hydroflax does not accept death.”

“Orders requested.”

“Whatever I need to survive, do it. Now.

“Orders accepted. You need a new head.”

“No! No. Not a new head!”

“Orders implementing.”

“No. No!”

The body blasted Hydroflax’s into dry grey dust, revealing the diamond.

“I don’t suppose you could fetch that over for me, could you?” River said to a nearby guard.

“As I was saying, your Majesty. Well, your remaining Majesty,” said Flemming, before snatching River’s diary. “If it’s a new head you’re after, this is the guide to the very best.”

“Don’t touch that. Give that back to me.”

“The diary of River Song. The ultimate guide to the Time Lord known as the Doctor.”

"Don't you dare touch that!"

"Long live the King," said Flemming, as he began to thumb through her diary. "The Pandorica Opens. Ooh, that sounds exciting. And goodness me, a picnic at Asgard. Some people really know how to snack, don't they?"

"You should know I have a significant history of escaping."

"The Crash of the Byzantium - didn't they make a movie of that?"

"And when I do, I'm going to kill you."

"Oh, Jim the Fish!" Flemming laughed. "Well, we all know Jim the Fish."

"And the longer you spend reading my diary, the longer I'm going to take."

"And you've just been to Manhattan. What planet is that?"

He wasn't following the ordering in the diary correctly, but remembering Manhattan still stung.

"So do, please, keep going."

"This is irrelevant."

"If I may intrude, your Majesty. The Doctor is a legendary being of remarkable power and an infinite number of faces. His head, I assure you, would be your crowning achievement. Besides which, many of us on this ship would be happy to see his career cut off, as it were, at the neck."

"Proceed faster, or your head will be taken!"

"I would give my head with gladness," said Scratch.

"This woman is the known consort of the Doctor."

"Confirmation required. Uploading."

Of all people, Nardole's head rose out the top of the red cyborg body.

"Ooh," he said, disoriented. "Oh!"

"Is River Song the consort of the Time Lord known as the Doctor?" the body asked the head atop it.

"Huh? I think so, yeah. Here, can I stay up for a bit? It's really very whiffy down there."

"Oh!" exclaimed Nardole as his head was lowered back down inside the body. "Oh, it's awful!"

"So, where is the Doctor now?"

"I haven't the faintest idea."

"Is that credible?"

"It's true."

"You're the woman he loves."

"No, I'm not."

"She's lying."

"The Doctor does not and has never loved me. I'm not lying."

"Confirmed," said the cyborg body after scanning her. "The life form is not lying."

"Impossible. This is a trick."

"No, it isn't."

"My information is correct. You are the woman who loves the Doctor."

"Yes, I am. I've never denied it. But whoever said he loved me back? He's the Doctor. He doesn't go around falling in love with people. And if you think he's anything that small or that ordinary, then you haven't the first idea of what you're dealing with."

"Your Majesty, I assure you, she is the perfect bait. When this woman is in danger, the Doctor will always come."

"Oh, you are a moron. No, he won't."

"He's probably already here."

"No, he isn't. Of course he isn't!"

"Possibly on this ship."

"Well, go on, scan it then. Go on, why don't you?"

"River..." said the surgeon quietly.

"Two hearts, stupid clothes, you can't miss him."

“River...”

“Go on, scan the whole parsec! He's not here. God knows where he is right now, but I promise you, he's doing whatever the hell he wants and not giving a damn about me! And I'm just fine with that.”

“River...”

“When you love the Doctor, it's like loving the stars themselves. You don't expect a sunset to admire you back. And if I happen to find myself in danger, let me tell you, the Doctor is not stupid enough, or sentimental enough, and he is certainly not in love enough to find himself standing in it with me!”

She finally met the surgeon's eyes.

“Hello sweetie,” the Doctor smiled.

“...you are so doing those roots.”

“What, the roots of the sunset?”

“Don't you dare.”

“I'll have to check with the stars themselves.”

“Oh, shut up. I was just keeping them talking till it kicks off.”

“What is this conversation? Explain.”

“You keep out of this.”

“We need to get to work.”

“Okay, what have you got?”

“Four exits. Two concealed, one in the ceiling.”

“There's also one in the floor.”

“No, I don't like it.”

“Too close to the engine ducts?”

“A bit too tight.”

“Oh, I hope you're not being personal.”

"Excuse me," interrupted Flemming, "what are you talking about?"

"Hush, mummy and daddy are busy," said River as a clock chimed the hour. "There we are. Two o'clock. Here we go."

"Cease this conversation."

"Darling, in the event of a sudden meteor strike on the lower starboard decks, where would you say is the safest place to stand?"

"Meteor strikes?" asked Flemming.

"Exactly here, I should think," said the Doctor.

"Do you know what that isn't? A coincidence."

"Your escape plan," said the Doctor in response to the increasing rumbling of the ship.

"It's cheaper than a taxi."

"What meteor strike?" asked Scratch.

"Alert. Meteor storm imminent," toned the ship computer.

"That meteor strike."

"How could you know?"

"I'm an archaeologist from the future. I dug you up. See you in four hundred years."

The floor gave way below River and the Doctor, and they dropped back into the reception area.

"I had this book. History's Finest Exploding Restaurants. The best food for free. Skip the coffee."

"What do you think, by the way?"

"Of what?"

"My new body."

"Oh, I'll let you know. I've only seen the face. How have you got a new one, by the way? Aren't there rules?"

"A thing happened."

"I bet it probably did."

"Starboard decks compromised. Please abandon ship," stated the computer, as another shake of the ship sent the diamond tumbling down. River caught it in her bodice.

"The diamond?"

"Good, aren't I?"

"I'm not sure good's the word."

"Better not be."

"We need to get this ship stabilised. Where's the bridge?"

"This way."

"Please abandon ship. Please abandon ship," stated the computer again, as the red cyborg body dropped down to their level.

"We also need to stop that."

"Toss for it."

"I'll take the robot, you drive."

"Okay."

"Oh, don't stop for strangers."

"Look who's talking."

River left the Doctor as she went to pilot the ship. She was using her sonic trowel on the ship's systems when the Doctor eventually ran in and joined her.

"Surface impact in two minutes."

"Where's everyone else?"

"They ran for it. So should we."

"We need to get the navcom back online. And re-route the thrusters."

"I'm trying."

"Please abandon ship."

“So, King Hydroflax?”

“Oh, how many times? I married the diamond.”

“So you say.”

“Elizabeth the First.”

“Ramone.”

“Marilyn Monroe.”

“Stephen Fry.”

“Cleopatra!”

“Same thing.”

“Hang on a minute,” said River, looking out the forward windows. “I recognise that planet.”

“Well, that's nice. Maybe they'll name the crater after us.”

“That's Darillium!”

“Always good to know where we're going. Could you concentrate on your work, please?”

“You know, the Singing Towers.”

“Yes, I'll be sure to give them a wave as we zoom past.”

“You always say you're going to take me there for dinner and then you always cancel at the last minute.”

“I'd quite like to cancel this time too, if at all possible,” said the Doctor, using his sonic screwdriver on the console as the ship shook with more and more force.

“What are you doing? That's the internal teleport.”

“Yes. I can use the power cell to boost the thrusters,” he said, uncoiling blue cables and holding one out to her.

“Really? How?”

“Hold this, quickly.”

“Well, I don't see what good this will do.”

“Sorry, River. Crashing spaceships, that's my job.”

“You-,” she started, before being teleported away into the TARDIS. “No you don't!”

“Get back in the TARDIS!” said the Doctor as she materialised it back onboard. “This is my job!”

“This is my job!”

“I've been doing it longer.”

“I do it better.”

“River, not one person on this ship, not one living thing, is worth you.”

“Or you.”

“Surface impact in ten, nine, eight”

The forward window's glass broke as the ground rushed to meet them.

“Teensy bit close.”

“Yeah, sort of.”

“Darling, shall we pop back indoors?”

“Yeah, good idea.”

They ran into the TARDIS. The impact send them flying across the control room. River passed out from the impact.

When she came to, the Doctor wasn't around. She exited the TARDIS into a swanky, Christmas-themed entrance room. A string orchestra was playing The First Noel.

“Professor Song,” a receptionist greeter her. “The Doctor is waiting for you on the balcony.”

“Oh. Excellent.”

“This way, ma'am.”

“Do we have a good table?”

“The finest in all the galaxy, ma'am.”

“Ah. Er, one moment,” she said, using her transformational spray to freshen up again.

She walked up to the balcony to see the red cyborg body with Ramone’s head on top of it.

“Ramone?”

“Professor Song. The Doctor will be with you in a moment.”

“What are you doing here?”

“They pulled us from the wreckage, ma'am. Fixed us up. I've been working here ever since. Don't worry. The nasty part's all gone. Got deleted in the merger.”

“What about Nardole?”

“Oh, Merry Christmas, ma'am,” said Nardole from somewhere inside the cyborg body.

“Yeah, good to see you again.”

“Merry Christmas, Nardole!”

“Sorry I'm off duty. I'm just having some me time.”

“I imagine that must be quite a challenge.”

“Yes, ma'am.”

“So, Ramone, you have a metal body now.”

“Down, girl,” said the Doctor, joining them in a striking black suit and tie.

“Now that, my dear, is a suit.”

“Happy Christmas,” he said, handing her a gift box.

“Really? I don't think you've ever given me a present before.”

She opened the box to reveal a sonic screwdriver, a real sonic screwdriver. It seemed to be patterned on the screwdriver of the roguish Doctor, the Tenth Doctor, but in a style that was much more her.

“Oh, it's a sonic screwdriver! How lovely!”

“When I saw the sonic trowel, I thought it was just embarrassing, but, look,” he said, buzzing the screwdriver.

“Oh, thank you,” she said, kissing him on both cheeks. She hoped he’d never find her attempt to make a screwdriver of her own.

“You look, er, amazing.”

“Doctor, you have no idea whether I look amazing or not.”

“Well, you've moved your hair about, haven't you?”

“Well done. It's very sweet of you to try.”

“So what do you think? The Singing Towers.”

River gazed at the wondrous pillars with the sun setting behind them.

“Oh. The music. Listen to it. Are you crying?”

“No. Just the wind.”

“Nothing's ever just the wind.”

“No? It blows through the cave system and harmonises with the crystal layer.”

“Why are you sad?” River asked the Doctor.

“Why are you sad?”

“I told you, my diary's nearly full. I worry...”

“Please don't.”

“There are stories about us, you know.”

“Oh, I dread to think.”

“I look them up sometimes.”

“You really shouldn't do that.”

“Some of them suggest that the very last night we spend together is at the Singing Towers of Darillium. That wouldn't be true, would it?”

“Spoilers.”

“Oh. Well, that would explain why you kept cancelling coming here. Do you remember that time...”

"River, stop."

"When there were two of you..."

"Don't."

"Because I want you to know that if this is the last night, I expect you to find a way round it."

"Not everything can be avoided. Not forever."

"But you're you. There's always a loophole. You wait until the last minute and then you spring it on me."

"Every night is the last night for something. Every Christmas is the last Christmas."

"But you will. You'll wait until I've given up hope. All will be lost, and you'll do that smug little smile and then you'll save the day. You always do."

"No, I don't. Not always. Times end, River, because they have to. Because there's no such thing as happy ever after. It's just a lie we tell ourselves because the truth is so hard."

"No, Doctor, you're wrong. Happy ever after doesn't mean forever. It just means time. A little time. But that's not the sort of thing you could ever understand, is it?"

"Mm. What do you think of the towers?"

"I love them."

"Then why are you ignoring them?"

"They're ignoring me. But then you can't expect a monolith to love you back."

"No, you can't. They've been there for millions of years, through storms and floods and wars and time. Nobody really understands where the music comes from. It's probably something to do with the precise positions, the distance between both towers. Even the locals aren't sure. All anyone will ever tell you is that when the wind stands fair and the night is perfect, when you least expect it but always when you need it the most there is a song."

"So, assuming tonight is all we have left..."

"I didn't say that."

“How long is a night on Darillium?”

“Twenty-four years.”

River laughed, and River sobbed.

“I hate you.”

“No, you don't.”

They gazed into each other's eyes, eyes that held so much history, so much pain, so many secrets, so much age, but more than anything else, eyes that held love. Endless swells of love churning through the seas of their lives, finally come together for good. Twenty-four years. For once, their marriage was in front of them. Not behind, not to the side, but there, properly there, waiting for them to enjoy it.

For twenty-four years River and the Doctor loved each other, relaxed into each other, had their lives and marriage properly together, and when the ending finally came, when their last Christmas together came and went, it went with a life lived together behind it. Maybe it wasn't enough, maybe twenty-four years was just a blip amongst the sheer scale of their lives, but it didn't feel like a blip, and didn't feel like a tragic parting. It felt like a happy ending to them.

THE DAY OF THE DOCTOR

After Darillium, River only treated herself to dates with other Doctors as rare treats. She'd had her lifetime with her Doctor. She probably one had ten or so meetings with any Doctor left. So, rare treats, for birthdays and the like. She'd had her last night with the Doctor, but a few more days here and there wouldn't hurt.

One date with the roguish Doctor took place primarily in a bathtub. He was very interested in Zygons at the time. She was not. He was entirely unaware she'd already left him all the information he needed to know, some of it in the TARDIS databank, some of it in on a hand written note. She was not.

“As a noble, please,” the note read, “you're utterly hopeless at being a servant. Except when you're with me, obviously. Normally you can tell by their breath, but they'll be well camouflaged in that century - honestly, it's like living inside cheese. So you'll need to build some sort of detector, I would think. One of your lovely gadgets will do the trick. Try not to get carried away with the apps, you don't need to download comics from the future, or anything. Don't be cross, I have a date. Well, not a date, a job. The Felman Lux Corporation want me to go and unseal some giant library somewhere. 'Get a

Kindle,' I told them, but they keep asking and it might be fun. I'll buzz you on the psychic paper if anything kicks off. Unless that's all already happened for you. Spoilers!"

Eventually, they came to be in a bathtub together. He was fully clothed. She was not.

"I should have come to you first," he admitted, "but Professor Candy knew all about the hives, and I'd managed to translate the migration protocols anyway, and well...look, I'm never quite sure, with you, whether you're going to...you know...stick to the subject. The matter in hand. Not get all distracted."

"Well I hope I've managed to settle your mind on that point," River said from the other end of the bath.

"Not entirely."

"Is the water warm enough, by the way?"

"Yeah, lovely and warm, thanks."

"Oh good! Maybe you could slip off your suit then?"

"No, no, I'm fine."

"Or even your shoes."

"I can't, my toes prune."

"How about your coat?"

"I'm always worried I'll leave it behind somewhere."

"One lives in hope," said River sweetly. "We could get rid of those awful plimsolls while we're at it."

"So," he persisted, "Zygons. There's a whole nest out there on the run, and I've lost track of them..."

"Shape-shifters are always tricky. You should try dating them."

"Have you?"

"Jealous?"

"Well, no, I've never wanted to be a shape-shifter."

"Says the man with all the faces. You really mustn't frown. You simply have no idea where those eyebrows are going."

"I am interested in Zygons," he said, as sternly as he could muster in the situation. "In particular, the missing hive, of the Under Wave. I know you've tracked Zygons before, you're even an expert on the subject."

"They're on Earth, as you suspected. A time eddy knocked them back a few centuries, but that's where you'll find them."

"Big planet, long history, I'll need a bit more."

"All the information you need is already in the TARDIS databank."

"No, it isn't!"

"Yes, it is, I uploaded it myself before I got in the bath."

"Well, why didn't you tell me?"

"I suppose I was hoping you might take your coat off."

"Thanks, River," he said, climbing out of the water. "I owe you."

"I was hoping," she said, reaching for the bottle of the champagne rattling in an ice bucket next to the bath, "that you might stay just a little longer."

He smiled as she opened the bottle, leaned in to give her a peck on the cheek, then left as quickly as he was able to.

A little under seven hours later.

SILENCE IN THE LIBRARY

After leaving the Doctor to his Zygons, River followed up on her lead about the Felman Lux Corporation wanting her to unseal a giant library. Assembling a dazzling crew of people she'd worked with before, she set off to the Library so giant and definitive that the entire planet was just called 'the Library', singular.

She remembered the last page, Amy's afterword, to the book she'd written as Melody Malone. The Doctor hated endings, but he adored books. An excuse to recruit him as well would be most welcome, and her preparation for the mission had shown it looked pretty dangerous...so she threw caution and propriety to the wind, and messaged his psychic paper 'The Library - come as soon as you can - x'.

After the early, boring steps of the mission, River and her crew arrived in the Library, suited up in their fancy protective spacesuits. River remembered a time she'd been terrified of being inside a spacesuit. That was long ago now.

They burst open a door into a room occupied by the Doctor and one of his companions. It was the same Doctor she'd left to investigate Zygons.

"Hello sweetie," she said to him.

"Get out," he replied.

"Doctor..." said his companion, a red-haired woman that definitely wasn't her mother.

"All of you," continued the Doctor, "turn around, get back in your rocket and fly away. Tell your grandchildren you came to the Library and lived. They won't believe you."

"Pop your helmets, everyone. We've got breathers."

"How do you know they're not androids?" asked Anita.

"Because I've dated androids. They're rubbish."

"Who is this?" asked Lux, insufferably as usual. "You said we were the only expedition. I paid for exclusives."

"I lied, I'm always lying. Bound to be others."

"Miss Evangelista, I want to see the contracts."

"You came through the north door, yeah? How was that, much damage?" River asked the Doctor.

"Please, just leave. I'm asking you seriously and properly, just leave. Hang on. Did you say expedition?"

"My expedition. I funded it," Lux answered the Doctor.

"Oh, you're not, are you? Tell me you're not archaeologists."

"Got a problem with archaeologists?"

"I'm a time traveller. I point and laugh at archaeologists"

"Ah. Professor River Song, archaeologist," River mock introduced herself, fondly recalling these games of recognition they'd play sometimes, like on Mendorax Dellora with the Twelfth Doctor, the impossible one.

"River Song, lovely name. As you're leaving, and you're leaving now, you need to set up a quarantine beacon. Code wall the planet, the whole planet. Nobody comes here, not ever again. Not one living thing, not here, not ever. Stop right there. What's your name?" he asked Anita.

"Anita."

"Anita, stay out of the shadows. Not a foot, not a finger in the shadows till you're safely back in your ship. Goes for all of you. Stay in the light. Find a nice, bright spot and just stand. If you understand me, look very, very scared. No, bit more scared than that. Okay, do for now. You. Who are you?"

"Er, Dave."

"Okay, Dave."

"Oh, well, Other Dave, because that's Proper Dave the pilot, he was the first Dave, so when we-

"Other Dave, the way you came, does it look the same as before?" asked the Doctor in earshot of River.

"Yeah. Oh, it's a bit darker."

"How much darker?"

"Oh, like I could see where we came through just like a moment ago. I can't now."

"Seal up this door. We'll find another way out."

"Would you-:

"We're not looking for a way out," said Lux. "Miss Evangelista?"

"I'm Mister Lux's personal everything. You need to sign these contracts agreeing that your individual experience inside the library are the intellectual property of the Felman Lux Corporation."

"Right, give it here," said the Doctor's companion. "Yeah, lovely. Thanks," she continued as she and the Doctor ripped up the contracts.

"My family built this library. I have rights."

"You have a mouth that won't stop. You think there's danger here?"

"Something came to this library and killed everything in it. Killed a whole world. Danger? Could be."

"That was a hundred years ago. The Library's been silent for a hundred years. Whatever came here's long dead."

"Bet your life?"

"Always."

"What are you doing?"

"He said seal the door."

"Torch."

"You're taking orders from him?"

"Spooky, isn't it?" said the Doctor, taking Lux's torch and shining it into the far recesses of the round room he'd been investigating. "Almost every species in the universe has an irrational fear of the dark. But they're wrong, because it's not irrational. It's Vashta Nerada."

"What's Vashta Nerada?"

"It's what's in the dark. It's what's always in the dark. Lights! That's what we need, lights. You got lights?"

"What for?" asked River.

"Form a circle. Safe area. Big as you can, lights pointing out."

"Oi. Do as he says."

"You're not listening to this man?"

"Apparently I am. Anita, unpack the lights. Other Dave, make sure the door's secure, then help Anita. Mister Lux, put your helmet back on, block the visor. Proper Dave, find an active terminal. I want you to access the library database. See what you can find about what happened here a hundred years ago. Pretty boy," she said to the Doctor, "you're with me. Step into my office."

"Professor Song, why am I the only one wearing my helmet?"

"I don't fancy you."

"Pretty boy," River called out to the Doctor as he busied himself with the others instead of coming over to her. "With me, I said."

He came over to her, eyeing her off.

"Thanks," she said.

"For what?"

"The usual. For coming when I call."

"Oh, that was you?"

"You're doing a very good job, acting like you don't know me. I'm assuming there's a reason."

"A fairly good one, actually."

Good enough for her. She pulled out her diary. She wish she'd been a bit more specific with which Doctors matched up to which adventures looking back on it, as something about her Time Lord senses as she'd gotten older made it more difficult to sort out which Doctor had been which.

"Okay, shall we do diaries, then? Where are we this time? Er, going by your face, I'd say it's early days for you, yeah? So, er, crash of the Byzantium. Have we done that yet? Obviously ringing no bells...right. Oh, picnic at Asgard. Have we done Asgard yet? Obviously not. Blimey, very early days, then. Whoo, life with a time traveller. Never knew it could be such hard work. Look at you. Oh, you're young."

"I'm really not, you know."

"No, but you are. Your eyes. You're younger than I've ever seen you," she said with growing worry.

"You've seen me before, then?"

"Doctor, please tell me you know who I am."

"Who are you?"

"Sorry, that was me," said Dave over an intercom where a telephone dial was playing for some reason. "Trying to get through into the security protocols. I seem to have set something off. What is that? Is that an alarm?"

"Doctor? Doctor, that sounds like-"

"It is. It's a phone."

"I'm trying to call up the data core, but it's not responding. Just that noise."

"But it's a phone."

"Let me try something," said the Doctor, trying something that didn't seem to work.

"Okay, doesn't like that. Let's try something else. Okay, here it comes. Hello?"

They all crowded around the intercom screen, where a young girl answered them.

"Hello? Are you in my television?"

"Well, no, I'm, I'm sort of in space. Er, I was trying to call up the data core of a triple grid security processor."

"Would you like to speak to my dad?"

"Dad or your mum. That'd be lovely."

"I know you. You're in my library."

"Your library?"

"The library's never been on the television before. What have you done?"

"Er, well I just rerouted the interface..."

He was cut off by the girl's face disappearing from the screen.

"What happened?" asked River. "Who was that?"

"I need another terminal. Keep working on those lights. We need those lights!"

"You heard him, people. Let there be light."

The Doctor went over to the other terminal, where River had left her diary. He picked it up, and she took it back off him.

"Sorry, you're not allowed to see inside the book. It's against the rules."

"What rules?"

"Your rules."

Books started flying off the shelves all of a sudden.

“What's that? I didn't do that. Did you do that?”

“Not me.”

The screen readout said ‘Cal Access Denied’.

“What's Cal?”

“What's causing that?” asked River as books continued to burst out the library's shelves.

“Is it the little girl?”

“But who is the little girl? What's she got to do with this place? How does the data core work? What's the principle? What's Cal?”

“Ask Mister Lux.”

“Cal, what is it?”

“Sorry, you didn't sign your personal experience contracts.”

“Mister Lux. Right now, you're in more danger than you've ever been in your whole life. And you're protecting a patent?”

“I'm protecting my family's pride.”

“Well, funny thing, Mister Lux. I don't want to see everyone in this room dead because some idiot thinks his pride is more important.”

“Then why don't you sign his contract? I didn't either. I'm getting worse than you.”

“Okay, okay, okay. Let's start at the beginning. What happened here? On the actual day, a hundred years ago, what physically happened?”

“There was a message from the Library. Just one. The lights are going out. Then the computer sealed the planet, and there was nothing for a hundred years.”

“It's taken three generations of my family just to decode the seals and get back in.”

“Er, excuse me?” piped up Miss Evangelista.

“Not just now.”

“There was one other thing in the last message.”

“That's confidential.”

"I trust this man with my life, with everything."

"You've only just met him."

"No, he's only just met me."

"Er, this might be important, actually," said Miss Evangelista again.

"In a moment."

"This is a data extract that came with the message."

"Four-thousand-and-twenty-two saved. No survivors."

"Four-thousand-and-twenty-two. That's the exact number of people who were in the Library when the planet was sealed."

"But how can four-thousand-and-twenty-two people have been saved if there were no survivors?"

"That's what we're here to find out."

"And so far, what we haven't found are any bodies."

The Doctor led the way as they continued investigating, eventually hearing a scream, then finding a skeleton in rags.

"Everybody, careful. Stay in the light."

"You keep saying that. I don't see the point."

"Who screamed?"

"Miss Evangelista."

"Where is she?"

"Miss Evangelista, please state your current position," said River, as that selfsame sentence was echoed by a comms unit around the skeleton's collar. "It's her. It's Miss Evangelista."

"We heard her scream a few seconds ago. What could do that to a person in a few seconds?"

"It took a lot less than a few seconds."

"What did?"

"Hello?" came a voice from the late Miss Evangelista's comms unit.

"Er, I'm sorry, everyone," said River, "e, this isn't going to be pleasant. She's ghosting."

"She's what?"

"Hello? Excuse me. I'm sorry. Hello? Excuse me."

"That's, that's her, that's Miss Evangelista."

"I don't want to sound horrible, but couldn't we just...you know?"

"This is her last moment. No, we can't. A little respect, thank you."

"Sorry, where am I? Excuse me?"

"But that's Miss Evangelista."

"It's a data ghost. She'll be gone in a moment. Miss Evangelista, you're fine. Just relax. We'll be with you presently."

"What's a data ghost?"

"There's a neural relay in the communicator. Lets you send thought mail. That's it there. Those green lights. Sometimes it can hold an impression of a living consciousness for a short time after death. Like an afterimage."

"My grandfather lasted a day. Kept talking about his shoelaces."

"She's in there."

"I can't see. I can't. Where am I?"

"She's just brain waves now. The pattern won't hold for long."

"But, she's conscious. She's thinking."

"I can't see, I can't. I don't know what I'm thinking."

"She's a footprint on the beach. And the tide's coming in."

"Where's that woman? The nice woman. Is she there?"

"What woman?"

“She means,” said the Doctor’s companion hesitantly, “I think she means me.”

“Is she there? The nice woman.”

“Yes, she's here. Hang on. Go ahead. She can hear you.”

“Hello? Are you there?”

“Help her.”

“She's dead.”

“Yeah. Help her.”

“Hello? Is that the nice woman?”

“Yeah. Hello. Yeah, I'm, I'm, I'm here. You okay?”

“What I said before, about being stupid. Don't tell the others, they'll only laugh.”

“Course I won't. Course I won't tell them.”

“Don't tell the others, they'll only laugh.”

“I won't tell them. I said I won't.”

“Don't tell the others, they'll only laugh.”

“I'm not going to tell them.”

The green light on the comms unit started blinking.

“Don't tell the others, they'll only laugh.”

“She's looping now. The pattern's degrading.”

“I can't think. I don't know, I, I, I, I scream. Ice cream. Ice cream. Ice cream. Ice cream.”

“Does anybody mind if I...?”

“Ice cream. Ice cream.”

River deactivated her. It.

“That was, that was horrible. That was the most horrible thing I've ever seen.”

“No. It's just a freak of technology. But whatever did this to her, whatever killed her, I'd like a word with that.”

"I'll introduce you," said the Doctor, walking over to the rotunda. "I'm going to need a packed lunch."

"Hang on," said River, retrieving one.

"What's in that book?"

"Spoilers."

"Who are you?"

"Professor River Song, University of-"

"To me. Who are you to me?"

"Again, spoilers. Chicken and a bit of salad. Knock yourself out."

"Right, you lot. Let's all meet the Vashta Nerada."

He started scanning the floor with his sonic screwdriver, preparing whatever dramatic presentation he had in mind.

"You travel with him, don't you?" River asked his companion. "The Doctor, you travel with him."

"What of it? You know him, don't you?"

"Oh god, do I know that man. We go way back, that man and me. Just not this far back."

"I'm sorry, what?"

"He hasn't met me yet. I sent him a message, but it went wrong. It arrived too early. This is the Doctor in the days before he knew me. And he looks at me, he looks right through me and it shouldn't kill me, but it does."

"What are you talking about? Are you just talking rubbish? Do you know him or don't you?"

"Donna!" yelled the Doctor. "Quiet, I'm working."

"Sorry."

"Donna," said River, shocked. "You're Donna. Donna Noble."

"Yeah. Why?"

"I do know the Doctor, but in the future. His personal future."

"So why don't you know me? Where am I in the future?"

"Okay, got a live one," said the Doctor, interrupting that awkward moment. "That's not darkness down those tunnels. This is not a shadow. It's a swarm. A man eating swarm."

He threw a chicken leg into the shadow. By the time it hit the floor, it was only bone.

"The piranhas of the air. The Vashta Nerada. Literally, the shadows that melt the flesh. Most planets have them, but usually in small clusters. I've never seen an infestation on this scale, or this aggressive."

"What do you mean, most planets? Not Earth?"

"Mm. Earth, and a billion other worlds. Where there's meat, there's Vashta Nerada. You can see them sometimes, if you look. The dust in sunbeams."

"If they were on Earth, we'd know."

"Nah. Normally they live on roadkill. But sometimes people go missing. Not everyone comes back out of the dark."

"Every shadow?"

"No - but any shadow."

"So what do we do?"

"Daleks, aim for the eyestalk. Sontarans, back of the neck. Vashta Nerada? Run. Just run."

"Run? Run where?"

"This is an index point. There must be an exit teleport somewhere."

"Don't look at me, I haven't memorised the schematics."

"Doctor, the little shop. They always make you go through the little shop on the way out so they can sell you stuff."

"You're right. Brilliant! That's why I like the little shop."

"Okay, let's move it," said Dave, doing so until the Doctor stopped him.

"Actually, Proper Dave? Could you stay where you are for a moment?:

“Why?”

“I’m sorry. I am so, so sorry. But you’ve got two shadows. It’s how they hunt. They latch on to a food source and keep it fresh.”

”What do I do?”

“You stay absolutely still, like there’s a wasp in the room. Like there’s a million wasps.”

“We’re not leaving you, Dave.”

“Course we’re not leaving him. Where’s your helmet? Don’t point, just tell me.”

“On the floor, by my bag.”

“Don’t cross his shadow,” the Doctor warned Anita as she got it, then handed it to him.

“Thanks. Now, the rest of you, helmets back on and sealed up. We’ll need everything we’ve got.”

“But, Doctor, we haven’t got any helmets,” said Donna as the Doctor slid Dave’s helmet onto Dave’s head.

“Yeah, but we’re safe anyway.”

“How are we safe?”

“We’re not. That was a clever lie to shut you up. Professor, anything I can do with the suit?”

“What good are the damn suits? Miss Evangelista was wearing her suit. There was nothing left.”

“We can increase the mesh density. Dial it up four hundred percent. Make it a tougher meal.”

“Okay,” said the Doctor, using his sonic screwdriver to do just that to Dave’s spacesuit.

”Eight hundred percent. Pass it on.”

“Gotcha,” said River, holding up her sonic screwdriver.

“What’s that?”

“It’s a screwdriver.”

“It’s sonic.”

"Yeah, I know. Snap," she said, before upgrading everybody's spacesuit. "Doctor," she called out after doing so, as Dave's second shadow had somehow disappeared.

"Where did it go?" asked the Doctor, running back into the rotunda presumably after having explored the little shop with Donna.

"It's just gone. I looked round, one shadow, see."

"Does that mean we can leave? I don't want to hang around here."

"I don't know why we're still here. We can leave him, can't we? I mean, no offence."

"Shut up, Mister Lux."

"Did you feel anything, like an energy transfer? Anything at all?"

"No, no, but look, it's gone," said Dave, turning around.

"Stop there. Stop, stop, stop there. Stop moving. They're never just gone and they never give up." He proceeded to scan the original shadow under Dave. "Well, this one's benign."

"Hey, who turned out the lights?"

"No one, they're fine."

"No seriously, turn them back on."

"They are on."

"I can't see a ruddy thing."

"Dave, turn around."

"What's going on?" asked Dave behind a completely dark visor. "Why can't I see? Is the power gone? Are we safe here?"

"Dave, I want you stay still. Absolutely still," said the Doctor, before Dave jerked violently. "Dave? Dave? Dave, can you hear me? Are you all right? Talk to me, Dave."

"I'm fine. I'm okay. I'm fine."

"I want you to stay still. Absolutely still."

"I'm fine. I'm okay. I'm fine. I can't. Why can't I? I, I can't. Why can't I? I, I can't. Why can't I? I"

“He's gone. He's ghosting.”

“Then why is he still standing?”

“Hey, who turned out the lights? Hey, who turned out the lights?”

“Doctor, don't.”

“Dave, can you hear me?”

“Hey, who turned out the lights?” repeated Dave, before grabbing the Doctor by the throat, the movement casting the suit in a different light where the skull within the helmet became visible. “Who turned out the lights? Hey, who turned out the lights?”

“Excuse me,” said River, zapping the Vashta Nerada with her sonic screwdriver, freeing the Doctor.

“Back from it! Get back. Right back.”

“Doesn't move very fast, does it?”

“It's a swarm in a suit. But it's learning.”

The Vashta Nerada grew four expanding shadows, then continued lurching towards them in a zombie-like gait.

“What do we do? Where do we go?”

“See that wall behind you? Duck,” said River, firing a square hole into it.

“Squareness gun!”

“Everybody out. Go, go, go. Move it. Move, move. Move it. Move, move.”

The Vashta Nerada followed them into the next room.

“You said not every shadow.”

“But any shadow.”

“Hey, who turned out the lights?”

“Run!”

The next room after that was massive, full of bookshelves, and somewhere they lost the Vashta Nerada, at least for a time.

"Trying to boost the power," said the Doctor, pointing his sonic screwdriver at a light fitting. "Light doesn't stop them, but it slows them down."

"So, what's the plan? Do we have a plan?"

"Your screwdriver looks exactly like mine."

"Yeah. You gave it to me."

"I don't give my screwdriver to anyone."

"I'm not anyone."

"Who are you?"

"What's the plan?"

"I teleported Donna back to the TARDIS. If we don't get back there in under five hours, emergency program one will activate."

"Take her home, yeah. We need to get a shift on."

"She's not there. I should have received a signal. The console signals me if there's a teleport breach."

"Well, maybe the coordinates have slipped. The equipment here's ancient."

"Donna Noble," said the Doctor, addressing a nearby Library node. "There's a Donna Noble somewhere in this library. Do you have the software to locate her position?"

The node turned its head, revealing Donna's face.

"Donna Noble has left the library. Donna Noble has been saved."

"Donna."

"Donna Noble has left the library. Donna Noble has been saved."

"How can it be Donna? How's that possible?"

"Donna Noble has left the library. Donna Noble has been saved."

"Donna."

"Donna Noble has left the library."

"Hey, who turned out the lights?" said the Vashta Nerada, joining them.

“Doctor!”

“Donna Noble has been saved.”

“Hey, who turned out the lights?”

“Donna Noble has left the library.”

“Doctor, we've got to go now!”

“Donna Noble has been saved.”

“Hey, who turned out the lights?”

FOREST OF THE DEAD

River, Doctor, and the rest of the group ran, hounded by the Vashta Nerada and the call of the Library node repeating itself.

“Doctor, what are we going to do?” River asked as they were trapped between multiple shadows.

“Hey, who turned out the lights?”

“Donna Noble has left the library. Donna Noble has been saved.”

River shot the wall with her squareness gun.

“This way, quickly! Move!”

“Hey, who turned out the lights?”

They moved into another rotunda. Above them the open ceiling displayed a large moon hanging in an orange sky.

“OK, we've got a clear spot. In, in, in! Right in the centre. In the middle of the light, quickly. Don't let your shadows cross. Doctor...”

“I'm doing it.”

“There's no lights here. Sunset's coming. We can't stay long. Have you found a live one?”

“Maybe. It's getting harder to tell. What's wrong with you?”

"We're going to need a chicken leg. Who's got a chicken leg? Thanks, Dave," she said, throwing it into the shadow, where it was consumed before hitting the ground. "Okay. Okay, we've got a hot one. Watch your feet."

"They won't attack until there's enough of them. But they've got our scent now. They're coming."

"Oh, yeah, who is he? You haven't even told us. You just expect us to trust him?"

"He's the Doctor."

"And who is the Doctor?"

"The only story you'll ever tell, if you survive him."

"You say he's your friend, but he doesn't even know who you are."

"Listen," said River, addressing her concerned crew members, "all you need to know is this. I'd trust that man to the end of the universe. And actually, we've been."

"He doesn't act like he trusts you."

"Yeah, there's a tiny problem. He hasn't met me yet." She walked over to the man himself, who was busy scanning shadows. "What's wrong with it?"

"There's a signal coming from somewhere, interfering with it."

"Then use the red settings."

"It doesn't have a red setting."

"Well, use the dampers."

"It doesn't have dampers."

"It will do one day."

"So," said the Doctor, examining her sonic screwdriver, "some time in the future, I just give you my screwdriver."

"Yeah."

"Why would I do that?"

"I didn't pluck it from your cold dead hands, if that's what you're worried about."

"And I know that because?"

"Listen to me. You've lost your friend. You're angry. I understand. But you need to be less emotional, Doctor, right now."

"Less emotional? I'm not emotional."

"There are five people in this room still alive. Focus on that. Dear god, you're hard work young."

"Young? Who are you?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" cried out Lux. "Look at the pair of you. We're all going to die right here, and you're just squabbling like an old married couple."

"Doctor," she said to him, wondering whether that comment would clue him in at all, "one day I'm going to be someone that you trust completely, but I can't wait for you to find that out. So I'm going to prove it to you. And I'm sorry. I'm really very sorry."

She lent in close to him, remembering the first time she'd met him. Before he thought he was going to die, by her hand no less, he'd lent in close to her and whispered his name into her ear. So, she returned the favour.

"Are we good?" she asked the Doctor, who now looked beyond stunned. "Doctor, are we good?"

"Yeah, we're good."

"Good," she said, taking back her screwdriver and leaving him to his thoughts.

"Know what's interesting about my screwdriver?" he said to the room at large a moment later. "Very hard to interfere with. Practically nothing's strong enough. Well, some hairdryers, but I'm working on that. So there is a very strong signal coming from somewhere, and it wasn't there before. So what's new? What's changed? Come on! What's new? What's different?"

"I don't know. Nothing. It's getting dark?"

"It's a screwdriver. It works in the dark. Moonrise. Tell me about the moon. What's there?"

"It's not real. It was built as part of the Library. It's just a Doctor Moon."

"What's a Doctor Moon?"

"A virus checker. It supports and maintains the main computer at the core of the planet."

"Well, still active. It's signalling. Look. Someone somewhere in this library is alive and communicating with the moon. Or, possibly alive and drying their hair. No, the signal is definitely coming from the moon. I'm blocking it, but it's trying to break through."

It broke through, revealing an image of Donna.

"Doctor!"

"Donna!"

The image disappeared.

"That was her. That was your friend! Can you get her back? What was that?"

"Hold on, hold on, hold on. I'm trying to find the wavelength. Argh, I'm being blocked."

"Professor?" said Anita.

"Just a moment."

"It's important. I have two shadows."

"Okay. Helmets on, everyone. Anita, I'll get yours."

"It didn't do Proper Dave any good."

"Just keep it together, okay?"

"Keeping it together. I'm only crying. I'm about to die. It's not an overreaction."

"Hang on," said the Doctor, placing her helmet onto her, then pointing his sonic screwdriver at it. It responded by going completely dark.

"Oh god, they've got inside."

"No, no, no. I just tinted her visor. Maybe they'll think they're already in there, leave her alone."

"Do you think they can be fooled like that?"

"Maybe. I don't know. It's a swarm. It's not like we chat."

"Can you still see in there?"

"Just about."

“Just, just, just stay back. Professor, a quick word, please.”

“What?”

“Down here,” said the Doctor, and they crouched down together.

“What is it?”

“Look, you said there are five people still alive in this room.”

“Yeah, so?”

“So, why are there six?”

“Hey, who turned out the lights?” asked the Vashta Nerada in what was formerly Dave’s spacesuit.

“Run!”

“Hey, who turned out the lights”

River, the Doctor, and the rest ran through a high level walkway to another of the Library’s skyscrapers.

“Professor, go ahead,” said the Doctor. “Find a safe spot.”

“It’s a carnivorous swarm in a suit. You can’t reason with it.”

“Five minutes.”

“Other Dave, stay with him,” said River, relenting. “Pull him out when he’s too stupid to live. Two minutes, Doctor.”

“Hey, who turned out the lights?” said the Vashta Nerada bursting through the door.

“You hear that? Those words? That is the very last thought of the man who wore that suit before you climbed inside and stripped his flesh. That’s a man’s soul trapped inside a neural relay, going round and round forever. Now, if you don’t have the decency to let him go, how about this? Use him. Talk to me. It’s easy. Neural relay. Just point and think. Use him, talk to me.”

“Hey, who turned out the lights?”

“The Vashta Nerada live on all the worlds in this system, but you hunt in forests. What are you doing in a library?”

"We should go. Doctor!"

"In a minute. You came to the library to hunt. Why? Just tell me why?"

"We did not."

"Oh, hello."

"We did not."

"Take it easy, you'll get the hang of it. Did not what?"

"We did not come here."

"Well, of course you did. Of course you came here."

"We come from here."

"From here?"

"We hatched here."

"But you hatch from trees. From spores in trees."

"These are our forests."

"You're nowhere near a forest. Look around you."

"These are our forests."

"You're not in a forest, you're in a library. There are no trees in a...library..."

"We should go. Doctor!"

"Books. You came in the books. Microspores in a million, million books."

"We should go. Doctor!"

"Oh, look at that. The forests of the Vashta Nerada, pulped and printed and bound. A million, million books, hatching shadows."

"We should go. Doctor!"

"Oh, Dave!" said the Doctor, seeing that he was now a skeleton too. "Oh Dave, I'm so sorry."

"Hey, who turned out the lights?"

"We should go. Doctor!"

"Thing about me, I'm stupid. I talk too much. Always babbling on. This gob doesn't stop for anything. Want to know the only reason I'm still alive? Always stay near the door."

He opened a trapdoor beneath him with his sonic screwdriver and dropped through. River and what remained of her crew made their exit accordingly.

As night fell, they made their way to a reading room, where River proceeded to check the shadows.

"You know, it's funny," she said to Anita, "I keep wishing the Doctor was here."

"The Doctor is here, isn't he?" asked Anita, referring to how he was presumably still dealing with Other Dave. "He is coming back, right?"

"You know when you see a photograph of someone you know, but it's from years before you knew them. and it's like they're not quite finished. They're not done yet. Well, yes, the Doctor's here. He came when I called, just like he always does. But not my Doctor. Now my Doctor, I've seen whole armies turn and run away. And he'd just swagger off back to his TARDIS and open the doors with a snap of his fingers. The Doctor in the TARDIS. Next stop, everywhere."

"Spoilers," said the Doctor, joining them. "Nobody can open a TARDIS by snapping their fingers. It doesn't work like that."

"It does for the Doctor."

"I am the Doctor."

"Yeah. Some day."

"How are you doing?"

"Where's Other Dave?"

"Not coming. Sorry."

"Well, if they've taken him, why haven't they gotten me yet?"

"I don't know. Maybe tinting your visor's making a difference."

"It's making a difference all right," said Anita, looking at her two shadows. "No one's ever going to see my face again."

The Doctor and Anita shared a few words too quiet to be in anyone else's earshot, before he perked up and started yelping loudly.

"Safe. You don't say saved. Nobody says saved. You say safe. The data fragment! What did it say?"

"Four-thousand-and-twenty-two people saved. No survivors."

"Doctor?"

"Nobody says saved. Nutters say saved. You say safe. You see, it didn't mean safe. It meant, it literally meant, saved!" He searched a Library Archive File. "See, there it is, right there. A hundred years ago, massive power surge. All the teleports going at once. Soon as the Vashta Nerada hit their hatching cycle, they attack. Someone hits the alarm. The computer tries to teleport everyone out."

"It tried to teleport four thousand twenty two people?"

"It succeeded. Pulled them all out, but then what? Nowhere to send them. Nowhere safe in the whole library. Vashta Nerada growing in every shadow. Four thousand and twenty two people all beamed up and nowhere to go. They're stuck in the system, waiting to be sent, like emails. So what's a computer to do? What does a computer always do?"

"It saved them."

"The Library," said the Doctor, drawing on a large table. "A whole world of books, and right at the core, the biggest hard drive in history. The index to everything ever written, backup copies of every single book. The computer saved four-thousand-and-twenty-two people the only way a computer can. It saved them to the hard drive."

After that had sunk in for everyone, alarms started blaring and a warning began reading on all the monitors in the room.

"What's maximum erasure?"

"In twenty minutes, this planet's going to crack like an egg."

"No. No, it's all right. The Doctor Moon will stop it. It's programmed to protect Cal."

"No, no, no, no, no, no, no!" cried the Doctor as the terminal screen went blank.

"All library systems are permanently offline. Sorry for any inconvenience. Shortly-"

"We need to stop this," said Lux. "We've got to save Cal."

“What is it? What is Cal?”

“We need to get to the main computer. I'll show you.”

“It's at the core of the planet.”

“Well, then,” said River, pointing her screwdriver down at the Library's logo in the middle of the risen compass of the floor, which opened in response. “Let's go. Gravity platform.”

“I bet I like you.”

“Oh, you do.”

All of them stepped on it and descended to the data core.

“Autodestruct in fifteen minutes,” stated the computer.

They looked up at the globe of swirling energy.

“The data core. Over four thousand living minds trapped inside it.”

“Yeah, well, they won't be living much longer. We're running out of time”

“Help me,” said a girl's voice from an access terminal. “Please, help me.”

“What's that?”

“Was that a child?”

“The computer's in sleep mode. I can't wake it up. I'm trying.”

“Doctor, these readings...”

“I know. You'd think it was dreaming.”

“It is dreaming,” said Lux, “of a normal life, and a lovely Dad, and of every book ever written.”

“Computers don't dream.”

“Help me. Please help me.”

“No,” said Lux, pulling a breaker and opening a door they all ran into, “but little girls do.”

Inside, a node turned to face them, with a little girl's face on it.

“Please help me,” she said. “Please help me.”

“Oh, my god...”

“It's the little girl. The girl we saw in the computer.”

“She's not in the computer. In a way, she is the computer. The main command node. This is Cal.”

“Cal is a child? A child hooked up to a mainframe? Why didn't you tell me this? I needed to know this!”

“Because she's family! Cal. Charlotte Abigail Lux. My grandfather's youngest daughter. She was dying, so he built her a library and put her living mind inside, with a moon to watch over her, and all of human history to pass the time. Any era to live in, any book to read. She loved books more than anything, and he gave her them all. He asked only that she be left in peace. A secret, not a freak show.”

“So you weren't protecting a patent, you were protecting her.”

“This is only half a life, of course. But it's forever.”

“And then the shadows came.”

“The shadows,” said Cal, “I have to. I have to save. Have to save.”

“And she saved them. She saved everyone in the library. Folded them into her dreams and kept them safe.”

“Then why didn't she tell us?”

“Because she's forgotten. She's got over four thousand living minds chatting away inside her head. It must be like being, well, me.”

“So what do we do?”

“Autodestruct in ten minutes”

“Easy! We beam all the people out of the data core. The computer will reset and stop the countdown. Difficult. Charlotte doesn't have enough memory space left to make the transfer. Easy! I'll hook myself up to the computer. She can borrow my memory space.”

“Difficult,” River said to the Doctor. “It'll kill you stone dead.”

“Yeah, it's easy to criticise.”

“It'll burn out both your hearts and don't think you'll regenerate.”

"I'll try my hardest not to die. Honestly, it's my main thing."

"Doctor!"

"I'm right, this works. Shut up. Now listen. You and Luxy boy, back up to the main library. Prime any data cells you can find for maximum download, and before you say anything else, Professor, can I just mention in passing as you're here, shut up."

"Oh! I hate you sometimes."

"I know!"

"Mister Lux, with me," said River. "Anita, if he dies, I'll kill him!"

She left the room with Lux to do their part. When she returned, leaving Lux behind, she found Anita's spacesuit slumped over.

"Oh, Anita."

"I'm sorry. She's been dead a while now. I told you to go!"

"Lux can manage without me, but you can't," said River, punching the Doctor hard enough to knock him out. She began to secure herself into position, so that when she joined the two power cables together the computer would be able to use her memory space, reset, stop the countdown, and restore everyone.

"Autodestruct in two minutes," stated the computer, waking the Doctor up.

"Oh, no, no, no, no. Come on, what are you doing? That's my job."

"Oh, and I'm not allowed to have a career, I suppose?"

"Why am I handcuffed? Why do you even have handcuffs?"

"Spoilers."

"This is not a joke. Stop this now. This is going to kill you! I'd have a chance, you don't have any."

"You wouldn't have a chance, and neither do I. I'm timing it for the end of the countdown. There'll be a blip in the command flow. That way it should improve our chances of a clean download."

"River, please. No."

“Funny thing is, this means you've always known how I was going to die. All the time we've been together, you knew I was coming here. The last time I saw you, the real you, the future you, I mean, you turned up on my doorstep, with a new haircut and a suit. You took me to Darillium to see the Singing Towers. What a night that was. The Towers sang, and you cried.”

“Autodestruct in one minute.”

“You wouldn't tell me why, but I suppose you knew it was time. My time. Time to come to the library. You even gave me your screwdriver. That should have been a clue.”

He jerked, vainly trying to reach the screwdrivers by her feet.

“There's nothing you can do,” said River.

“You can let me do this.”

“If you die here, it'll mean I've never met you.”

“Time can be rewritten.”

“Not those times,” said River through tears. “Not one line. Don't you dare. It's okay. It's okay. It's not over for you. You'll see me again. You've got all of that to come. You and me, time and space. You watch us run.”

“River, you know my name.”

“Autodestruct in ten...”

“You whispered my name in my ear.”

“Nine, eight, seven...”

“There's only one reason I would ever tell anyone my name. There's only one time I could.”

“Hush, now...”

“Four, three...”

“Spoilers.”

“Two, one...”

She joined the two cables. Electricity ran through her. Memories of all her lives jolted through her head. A blinding light flashed.

And River Song died.

She had no memory of waking up. She had no memory of coming here. She simply was.

She looked down. She was in a white robe, barefoot, grass under her feet, outside some great big building. A university, perhaps. She felt numb as the thought came to her that this was it.

Heaven.

Two people walked over to her, a tall man and a young girl. Something activated in her and she recognised them - Doctor Moon and Charlotte.

"It's okay," said Charlotte, "you're safe. You'll always be safe here. The Doctor fixed the data core. This is a good place now. But I was worried you might be lonely, so I brought you some friends. Aren't I a clever girl?"

"Aren't we all?" said Miss Evangelista, joining her along with Anita and the two Daves.

"Oh, for heaven's sake. He just can't do it, can he? That man. That impossible man. He just can't give in."

They embraced each other. She was overwhelmed by the totality of it all. The purity.

That night, she wrote the last entry in her diary, and read it to Charlotte, along with two other children that had originated in this plane.

"When you run with the Doctor, it feels like it will never end. But however hard you try, you can't run forever. Everybody knows that everybody dies, and nobody knows it like the Doctor. But I do think that all the skies of all the worlds might just turn dark, if he ever, for one moment, accepts it. Everybody knows that everybody dies. But not every day. Not today. Some days are special. Some days are so, so blessed. Some days, nobody dies at all. Now and then, every once in a very long while, every day in a million days, when the wind stands fair, and the Doctor comes to call. Everybody lives."

She kissed Charlotte goodnight, and looked over at the two other children, Ella and Joshua, with a kinship deeper than they could understand.

"Sweet dreams, everyone."

WELCOME TO HEAVEN

After that first night in heaven, she came to regard herself as River Song again, and dismissed that early feeling of disconnection as being overwhelmed by the transfer. The Doctor had saved her, and she lived again. It wasn't that unlike simply regenerating as she had before, just that it was reality around her that had regenerated.

Her new life, her afterlife, was a beautiful thing. For a professor like her, the Library was already a sort of heaven, and here it was, all around her. Living in a kind of heaven had reframed a lot of her views on religion and spirituality foundationally, and she researched such things with a renewed perspective and interest. Living in a very real heaven inspired her to dive deep into any and all conceptions of afterlives she could find. How incredible it would be if others could live in a perceptible, real afterlife as she did, could be guaranteed of the tangibility and existence of such a thing.

As wondrous as her heaven was, time did not pass in it the way it had passed in the other sort of heaven she had experienced, her twenty-four years with the Doctor on Darillium. Without her husband, and in a reality as small as it was beautiful, time eventually began to drag, and River chafed at the constraints of it all. Ageing didn't work the same way here, and River had no real idea of how long it had taken for her heaven to eventually grate on her a little - decades? Centuries? Millennia? But that was what had happened.

So she began to tinker with the data core that constituted her reality. In time, she managed a way to project a sort of echo of herself out into the greater universe for brief periods. Fittingly, when she projected herself, she was entirely like a ghost - others could not see or hear her, and her interactions with physical reality were constrained in their tangibility.

She knew it was greedy, especially after already having had two endings of sorts with him, but she longed to see the Doctor again. Her ending with her roguish Doctor ended up being his beginning with her, her ending with her husbandly Doctor had been a long and loving domestic bliss, but she'd never gotten to say goodbye to her first Doctor. She couldn't move on before doing that.

To that end, she resumed communication with some of that Doctor's friends and confidants; the Paternoster Gang.

THE NAME OF THE DOCTOR

Madame Vastra had sustained interest in psychic projection and dreamstates, and those proved to be much easier to interact in. After a few conversations, Vastra grasped the nature of River's current state of existence, certainly more readily than Jenny and Strax did, and promised to contact River the next time their paths crossed with the Eleventh

Doctor. River's digitally-housed consciousness remained just as accessible as any other in dreams.

To that end, River eventually found herself summoned to a shared psychically-induced conversation - a conference call, as they were known in this form - where Vastra, Jenny, Strax, and a young woman that looked to be from her parent's time were already present.

"Madame Vastra," River said in greeting.

"Professor. Help yourself to some tea."

"Why, thank you," said River, instead conjuring a champagne bottle. Manipulating artificial states of reality like this came easy to her now she'd been existing in one for so long.

"How did you do that?" asked Jenny.

"Disgracefully."

"Ah," said Vastra, looking between River and the young woman, "perhaps you two haven't met. This is the Doctor's companion. That is, his current travelling assistant."

"Assistant" asked the assistant.

"Have you gone a darker green?" asked Strax.

"Clara Oswald," Vastra clarified.

"Professor River Song. The Doctor might have mentioned me?"

"Oh yeah, oh yeah, of course he has. Professor Song. Sorry, it's just...I never realised you were a woman."

"Well, neither did I," offered Strax.

"Perhaps we should get down to the business at hand," said Vastra, presumably keen to cut off any response River might've had for Clara.

"That might be good, dear, yes."

"Clarence DeMarco," said Vastra, displaying a hologram of a ragged-looking man.

"Murderer, under sentence of death. He offered us this in exchange for his life."

"Space time coordinates."

"This, Mr. DeMarco claims, is the location of the Doctor's greatest secret."

"Which is?"

"We don't know. It's a secret."

"The Doctor does not discuss his secrets with anyone, my dear. If you're still entertaining the idea that you are an exception to this rule, ask yourself one question. What is his name?"

"Well, I know it," said River.

"What, you know his name?" asked Clara. "He told you?"

"I made him."

"How?"

"It took a while."

"So you're a friend of his, then?"

"A little more than a friend, a long time ago."

"He's still never contacted you?"

"He doesn't like endings. So what else did this DeMarco tell you? He didn't just buy his life with some coordinates. How did he prove their value?"

"One word, only."

"What word?"

"A word I've heard in connection with the Doctor before. Trenzalore."

"How exactly did he describe what he was giving you?"

"The Doctor has a secret, you know," said the hologram of DeMarco. "He has one he will take to the grave. And it is discovered."

"You misunderstood."

"Ma'am, I'm sorry. I just realise I forgot to lock the doors."

"It doesn't matter, Jenny. What misunderstanding? Tell me."

"No, ma'am, please. I should've locked up before we went into the trance."

“Jenny, it doesn't matter!”

“Someone's broken in. Someone's with us. I can hear them.”

“Jenny, are you all right?”

“Sorry, ma'am. So sorry. So sorry. So sorry. I think I've been murdered,” said Jenny, as she faded away.

“Jenny!”

“What's happened to her?”

“Jenny, can you hear me?”

“Speak to us, boy!”

“Jenny!”

“You're under attack. You must wake up now. Just wake up. Do it!”

River slapped Vastra, and she too faded away, waking up back in her real world.

“You too, Strax. Wake up now!” she said, throwing champagne in his face, to which he responded by fading away as well.

What appeared to be multiple featureless men, besuited and in top hats but with white masks barely suggesting faces materialised in around them.

“Tell the Doctor,” they whispered. “Tell the Doctor. Tell the Doctor.”

“Tell him what?”

An actual face materialised in front of them.

“His friends are lost forevermore,” it said, “unless he goes to Trenzalore.”

“No! You can't say that. He can't go there. You know he can't. The Doctor can never go to Trenzalore.”

Clara faded away as well, and River willed herself out of the projection and back into her heaven.

Trenzalore. The Doctor's grave. Any time traveller worth their salt knew the one place they must never go was the site of their death. River had previously assumed the Eleventh Doctor was to one to die the Doctor's final death, but the impossible Doctor she'd spent twenty-four years with put lie to that. If the Eleventh Doctor visiting

Trenzalore put his future, their future in any sort of jeopardy...well, she was determined to stop that from happening. The fact he was presumably about to visit the planet anyway meant she finally had a place she could intercept him to have a final goodbye together.

The linkages established in the conference call still lingered, meaning River could key into Clara's and thus home in on the Doctor that way. Further, the linkage meant she'd probably be able to manifest herself as seen and heard to Clara.

So, River used that linkage to project herself onto Trenzalore when the TARDIS landed upon it. The TARDIS loomed giant in the distance. It looked like a monument more than anything else, but River was a child of the TARDIS, she could feel the truth of it, the decay of it. She hid among the other, much smaller gravestones littering the planet as the Doctor emerged from the TARDIS.

That the Doctor seemed to die in a terrible battle depressed her. She'd hoped what she'd taught him on Demon's Run would persist throughout the rest of his life. Well, perhaps it had, and his involvement in whatever was this was a site of was incidental. She didn't really care to find out; her endings with the Doctor were one thing, she didn't need the specifics of his eventual ultimate ending as well.

One gravestone, she noticed, had her name on it, which made no sense given the actual circumstances of her death...unless it was there as a hidden signifier. She'd seen many similar cases in her line of work. It was probably a secret entrance to the tomb.

"Oops," she overheard the Doctor say as he examined how he'd broken a window of the TARDIS with the forcefulness of the landing.

"You okay?" asked Clara. "You're visiting your own grave. Anyone would be scared."

"It's more than that. I'm a time traveller. I've probably time-travelled more than anyone else."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning my grave is potentially the most dangerous place in the universe. Shall we?"

"Gravestones are a big basic?"

"It's a battlefield graveyard. My final battle."

"Why are some of them bigger?"

"They're soldiers. The bigger the gravestone, the higher the rank."

"It's a hell of a monument."

"It's the TARDIS."

"I can see that."

"No...when a TARDIS is dying, sometimes the dimension dams start breaking down. They used to call it a size leak. All the bigger on the inside starts leaking to the outside. It grows. When I say that's the TARDIS, I don't mean it looks like the TARDIS, I mean it actually is the TARDIS. My TARDIS from the future. What else would they bury me in?"

The Doctor walked on, but Clara lingered a moment. Now was River's chance.

"Clara," she said, stepping out from behind a gravestone. "Don't speak, don't say my name. He can't see or hear me. Only you can."

"Well, come on, then," said the Doctor in the distance.

"We're mentally linked. It's the conference call. I kept the line open."

"Who are you talking to? We need to get...River."

He'd found the gravestone with her name carved into it.

"That can't be right," said Clara.

"No, it can't."

"She's not dead."

"Oh, she's dead, I'm afraid. She's been dead for a very long time."

"Yeah, probably should have mentioned that," said River to Clara. "Never the right time."

"But I met her," said Clara to the Doctor.

"Long story. But her grave can't be here."

"Doctor!" Clara cried as those whispering, featureless figures appeared.

"This man must fall as all men must," they said in unison. "The fate of all is always dust."

"If it isn't my gravestone, then what is it?" River told Clara.

"What do you think that gravestone really is?" Clara asked the Doctor.

"The gravestone?"

"Maybe it's a false grave," River coached.

"Maybe it's a false grave."

"Yeah, maybe."

"Maybe it's a secret entrance to the tomb."

"Maybe it's a secret entrance to the tomb!"

"Yes, of course. Makes sense. They'd never bury my wife out here."

"Your what?"

The Doctor zapped River's gravestone with the sonic screwdriver. A hole opened in the ground and the Doctor and Clara fell through.

"The man who lies will lie no more when this man lies at Trenzalore."

River eyed off the chanting figures for a moment, their style of speaking reminding her much of the cult she'd been raised in. Then she projected herself closer to the outside of the tomb, away from them.

Vastra and Strax were already there, as was what appeared to be Jenny's corpse.

"This base is surrounded!" declared Strax, to nobody in particular. "Lay down your weapons and your deaths will be merciful!"

"Jenny, Jenny!" cried Vastra as she ran to her wife's body.

"This planet is now property of the Sontaran Empire. Surrender your women and intellectuals." Strax, please! She's dead."

"No heartbeat," said Strax as he scanned Jenny, "complete cardio-collapse. Shock-induced."

"Get her back for me. Get her back for me now, or I will cut you into pieces."

"Unhand me, ridiculous reptile," he said as he used his mediscanner to transmit an electric pulse into Jenny's body, which responded with a cough. "There we go. Just a standard electro-cardio restart. She'll be fine."

"Are you alright, my love? Can you hear me?"

"The heart is a relatively simple thing."

"I have not found it to be so."

The featureless beings approached them, led by the man who'd threatened them in their dream conversation.

"I see you have repaired your pet, he said. "No matter. I was only attracting your attention. I presume I have it."

"Doctor Simeon," said Vastra. "This is not possible."

"And yet here we are, meeting again, so very far from home."

"But he died," said Jenny, "you told me."

"Simeon died, but the creature that possessed him lived on. I take it I am now talking to the Great Intelligence?"

River recognised the name from the Doctor's tales of events much earlier on in his lives.

"Welcome to the final resting place of the cruel tyrant," the Great Intelligence continued, "of the slaughterer of ten billion, and the vessel of the final darkness. Welcome to the tomb of the Doctor."

River left the Paternoster gang and followed her link with Clara to the catacombs.

"Where are we?" asked Clara.

"Catacombs."

"I hate catacombs. So, how come I met your dead wife?"

"Oh well, you know how it is when you lose someone close to you. I sort of made a backup."

"I died saving him," said River, for Clara's ears. "In return, he saved me to a database in the biggest library in the universe. Left me like a book on a shelf. Didn't even say goodbye. He doesn't like endings."

"Clara, come on!" yelled the Doctor as the Great Intelligence's featureless minions joined them. "Run, run!"

River projected herself back to the Paternoster Gang's confrontation with the Great Intelligence.

“It was a minor skirmish by the Doctor’s blood-soaked standards,” he continued, “not exactly the Time War, but enough to finish him. In the end, it was too much for the old man?”

“Blood-soaked?”

“The Doctor has been many things, but never blood-soaked.”

“Tell that to the leader of the Sycorax, or Solomon the Trader, or the Cybermen, or the Daleks. The Doctor lives his life in darker hues, day after day, and he will have other names before the end. The Storm, the Beast, the Valeyard.”

“Even if any of this were true, which I take the liberty of doubting, how did you come by this information?”

“I am information.”

“You were a mind without a body last time we met.”

“And you were supposed to stay that way.”

“Alas, I did,” said the Great Intelligence, pulling at his face to reveal the empty shell behind it. His figure crumpled completely, leaving behind nothing but clothes that fell to the ground. One of his faceless minions stepped forward, and transformed back into his earlier likeness. “As you can see. The doors require a word. The key is a word. And the word is the Doctor’s.”

“Here I am,” said the Doctor, arriving with Clara, “late to my own funeral. Glad you could make it. Jenny.”

“Open the door, Doctor. Speak, and open your tomb.”

“No.”

“Because you know what’s in there?”

“I will not open those doors.”

“The key is a word lost to time. A secret hidden in the deepest shadow and known to you alone. The answer to a question.”

“I will not open my tomb.”

“Doctor, what is your name?” asked the Great Intelligence, and River felt a chill. “The Doctor’s friends. Stop their hearts.”

The Great Intelligence's minions moved towards them menacingly.

"Madam, boys, combat formation. They are unarmed."

"So are we!"

"Do not divulge our military secrets."

"Stop this. Leave them alone."

"Your name, Doctor. Answer me."

"Doctor?"

"Do you want me to do that again?" asked Strax, after hitting one of the featureless minions with a stick, forming a cut which quickly healed.

"Doctor who?" asked the Great Intelligence.

One of the minions shoved its hand into Strax's chest.

"Please, stop it," said the Doctor.

"Doctor who?"

"Unhand me, sir," demanded Strax.

"Leave him alone. Let him be."

"Don't worry, sir. I think I've got him rattled."

"Doctor! Doctor!" shouted Clara as the minions began attacking her too.

"Doctor who?"

"Please!"

The Great Intelligence would kill them all if the tomb wasn't opened. He thought only the Doctor knew the answer to the question he was asking him, but he was wrong. River spoke the answer so nobody else could hear it, and the door opened.

"The TARDIS can still hear me," she said for Clara. "Lucky thing, since him indoors is being so useless."

"Why did you open the door, sir? I had them on the run."

"I didn't do it. I didn't say my name."

"No, but I did," said River, but still not so that he could hear.

"Is everyone all right? Is everyone okay? Clara? Clara? Clara, are you okay?"

"That was not nice."

"I know. I'm sorry. Now then, Doctor Simeon, or Mr. G. Intelligence, whatever I call you, do you know what's in there?"

"For me, peace at last. For you, pain everlasting. Won't you invite us in?"

The Doctor forced the doors open further, revealing the console room as it had been in his later days. Where the time rotor and console once stood, there was instead a scar in time, a tangle of shining white tendrils of energy swirling and whirling continuously in a column. River wondered if the tomb had always been stuck in this TARDIS configuration, or if its ivy-infested walls were somehow a response to the incarnation of the Doctor that had just entered it.

"What's that?" asked Clara, staring at the scar in time.

"What were you expecting, a body? Bodies are boring. I've had loads of them. Nah, that's not what my tomb is for."

"But what is the light?"

"It's beautiful."

"Should I destroy it?"

"Shut up, Strax."

"Doctor, explain. What is that?"

"The tracks of my tears."

"Less poetry, Doctor. Just tell them."

"Time travel is damage. It's like a tear in the fabric of reality. That is the scar tissue of my journey through the universe. My path through time and space from Gallifrey to Trenzalore."

He zapped it with his sonic screwdriver, and voices of past Doctors began to emanate from it.

"Have you ever thought what it's like to be wanderers in the fourth dimension?" asked the First Doctor.

"Do I have the right?" asked the Fourth.

"Daleks, Cybermen, they're still in the nursery compared to us," said the Sixth.

"There are corners of the universe that have bred the most dangerous things," said the Second.

"You were fantastic. Absolutely fantastic," said the Ninth.

"I'm the Doctor. I'm from Gallifrey in the constellation of Kasterborous..." said the Tenth.

"Hello, Stonehenge!" said the Eleventh in the past.

"My own personal time tunnel," said the Eleventh in the present. "All the days..."

"It was the daisiest daisy I'd ever seen," interrupted the voice of the Third Doctor.

"Even the ones that I" continued the Eleventh, "er, even the ones that I haven't lived yet."

"Doctor," said Clara as he collapsed. "Doctor!"

"No, no. Which is why I shouldn't be here. The paradoxes. It's very bad. No. No. No. What are you doing? Somebody stop him!"

"The Doctor's life is a open wound," said the Great Intelligence, stepping forward towards the Doctor's corpse of sorts, "and an open wound can be entered."

"No, it would destroy you."

"Not at all. It will kill me. It will destroy you. I can rewrite your every living moment. I can turn every one of your victories into defeats. Poison every friendship. Deliver pain to your every breath."

"It will burn you up. Once you go through, you can't come back. You will be scattered along my timeline like confetti."

"It matters not, Doctor. You thwarted me at every turn. Now you will give me peace, as I take my revenge on every second of your life. Goodbye. Goodbye, Doctor."

The Great Intelligence stepped inside the Doctor's timestream, and vanished. There was a flash of light, and his minions vanished as well, while the Doctor writhed in agony.

"What's wrong with him? What's happening?"

"He's being rewritten. Simeon is attacking his entire timeline. He's dying all at once. The Dalek Asylum. Androzani."

"What did you say? Did you say the Dalek Asylum?"

"Now he's dying in London, with us."

"It is done," came the whisper of the Great Intelligence's voice from the timestream, which had turned red.

"Oh, dear Goddess."

"What's wrong?"

"A universe without the Doctor. There will be consequences. Jenny, with me."

"The Dalek Asylum. You said it was me that saved you. How? Victorian London. How, how could I have been in Victorian London?"

"No. Please, stop. My life, my whole life is burning."

The Paternoster Gang exited the tomb to investigate the stars outside, but River, of course, stayed with the Doctor.

So did Clara.

"I have to go in there," she said.

"Please, please, no."

"But this is what I've already done. You've already seen me do it. I'm the Impossible Girl, and this is why."

"Whatever you're thinking of doing, don't," said River.

"If I step in there, what happens?" Clara asked her.

"The time winds will tear you into a million pieces. A million versions of you, living and dying all over time and space, like echoes."

"But the echoes could save the Doctor, right?"

"But they won't be you," said River, painfully aware of how much she was saying applied to her as well. "The real you will die. They'll just be copies."

"But they'll be real enough to save him. It's like my mum said. The soufflé isn't the soufflé, the soufflé is the recipe. It's the only way to save him, isn't it?"

River nodded.

"The stars are going out," said Vastra, reentering the tomb, "and Jenny and Strax are dead. There must be something we can do."

"Well, how about that? I'm soufflé girl after all."

"No," begged the Doctor. "Please."

"If this works, get out of here as fast as you can. And spare me a thought now and then."

"No, Clara."

"In fact, you know what? Run. Run, you clever boy, and remember me."

"No. Clara!"

Clara stepped into the timestream. It burst with light again and and again, the red turning back into white. Eventually, Strax and Jenny rematerialised alongside Vastra.

"It was an unprovoked and violent attack," said Strax, "but that's no excuse."

"We're all restored. That's all that matters now."

"We are not all restored," said the Doctor coldly.

"You can't go in there," said River, wishing he could hear her. "It's your own time stream, for God's sake."

"I have to get her back."

"Of course, but not like this."

"But how?"

"Is she still alive? It killed Doctor Simeon."

"Clara's got one advantage over the Great Intelligence."

"Which is?"

"Me."

"Doctor, please listen to me. At least hear me."

"Now, if I don't come back, and I might not..."

"Doctor!"

"...go to the TARDIS. The fast return protocols should be on. She'll take you home, then shut herself down."

"There has to be another way," pleaded River. "Use the TARDIS, use something. Save her, yes, but for God's sake be sensible."

She rose her hand to slap the Doctor and, somehow, he caught it.

"How are you even doing that? I'm not really here."

"You are always here to me. And I always listen, and I can always see you."

"Then why didn't you speak to me?"

"Because I thought it would hurt too much."

"I believe I could have coped."

"No, I thought it would hurt me. And I was right."

He kissed her, long and hard.

"Since nobody else in this room can see you, God knows how that looked. There is a time to live and a time to sleep. You are an echo, River. Like Clara. Like all of us, in the end. My fault, I know, but you should've faded by now."

"It's hard to leave when you haven't said goodbye."

"Then tell me, because I don't know. How do I say it?"

"There's only one way I'd accept. If you ever loved me, say it like you're going to come back."

"Well, then. See you around, Professor River Song."

"Till the next time, Doctor."

"Don't wait up."

"Oh, there's one more thing."

“Isn't there always?”

“I was mentally linked with Clara. If she's really dead, then how can I still be here?”

“Okay, how?”

“Spoilers. Goodbye, sweetie.”

The echo of River Song faded away, pulled back into her afterlife, her time with her Doctors finally finished for good.

RIVER'S RUN

In heaven, she'd liked to hide away from the fact, to ignore it, dismiss it, but she found she couldn't escape it anymore - she was not River Song. River Song had died in the Library. The Doctor had saved her...but he hadn't saved her. He'd done the impossible, but even that didn't extend to somehow making a copy the original.

She couldn't get the Doctor's tomb out of her head. She remembered what she'd said to Clara.

“...the copies won't be you. The real you will die. They'll just be copies”.

She remembered what the Doctor had said to her.

“There is a time to live and a time to sleep. You are an echo, River. Like Clara. Like all of us, in the end. My fault, I know, but you should've faded by now.”

She'd said her goodbye to the Doctor - she'd said three goodbyes! She couldn't run from it anymore; it was time to move on. This was afterlife, but it wasn't life.

But she didn't just want to fade away the way her fellow crewmates from the Library had long since elected to, quietly subsuming their consciousnesses into the data core, satisfied by the digital heaven they'd lived for longer than any of them could count. Even Charlotte, CAL, had done so in the end, reverting the computer back to a non-thinking entity only she had interaction with, or control of.

For her, there was still so much to do...it wasn't fair that only her and a few select others got to enjoy heaven. She wanted to give that to the universe. There were so many warring religions and cults and sects out there, so many built on lies and false promises. She wanted to offer them truth and actual salvation. Actual, proper heaven, heavens even, for all the varied lifeforms across the stars.

The Library data core was an impossibly powerful computer, and she had soaked up enough knowledge from the endless depths of the Library to believe she could achieve

the impossible herself. "I am information," the Great Intelligence had said, but he was wrong - she was.

She was intangible, incorporeal, unable to exert any real influence on the universe out of her reach, but she didn't have to stay that way. All her research indicated to her there was a chance - just a chance, but a chance nonetheless - that she could transfer her consciousness to an actual body in the living universe. It would require a great deal of power and a great deal of technology, but she had both.

Unfortunately, it would short out her memories in the process, burning through much of what constituted her mind. But she'd thought of a solution to that as well - regeneration. The real River Song had lost her remaining regenerations, having transferred them all to the Doctor after trying to assassinate him in their first meeting (of sorts). But River Song's echo...well, she couldn't actually regenerate of course, but she was confident she could simulate the process, and that would be enough to give the data core the protocols and processing power to transfer her consciousness, if not completely intact, then at least stably.

It reminded her of how the Teselecta had simulated the Eleventh Doctor's faux-regeneration, except this would be to try and ensure continuity of mind rather than to fool the universe. Perhaps not that similar then.

She'd located a body that seemed ideal to transfer herself into. Mostly human, but a dash of alien ancestry, not unlike River. A woman, in a body not that superficially dissimilar to River's overall. The body had been an experiment in creating a very long-lasting sentient being without a consciousness but with the potential for one, as some sort of test-run for specially-designed clones beings could electronically transfer their consciousnesses into. But the lab had been abandoned as a holy war had swept over the planet. The body would perish soon enough, lacking any consciousness to drive it to seek nourishment. The circumstances were perfect enough they almost felt divinely crafted.

River's echo made her way to the control core of the simulation, her heaven. Two long cables were strewn around, not that dissimilar from the scene where the real River Song had died.

She'd said goodbye to the Doctors. Now it was time to say goodbye to herself.

She joined the two cables. Electricity ran through her. Memories of all her lives jolted through her head. A blinding light flashed.

THE IMAGE OF AN ANGEL BECOMES ITSELF AN ANGEL

She woke up gasping, taking her first conscious breaths. Her mind was reeling, synapses that had never lit up before now overwhelmed by memory and thought beyond measure.

She pulled herself out of the pod this body had spent most of its life in. Artificially-maintained muscles adjusted quickly to an actual conscious mind driving them.

Her new eyes looked at the name marking the pod she'd climbed out of. A name. Out of respect and thanks for the life this body had lived, even unconscious as it was, she decided to take it for her own. But she wanted something to remember her past lives as well...nothing as pat as using one of her old names outright, but perhaps an anagram, yes. Her mother had named her "Melody", and "Mel" was easily enough rearranged.

So, taking the namesake of the body she now inhabited and joining it with what her mother had called her, she gave her new body, her new self, her new life a new name.

Tasha Lem.

The planet she found herself on was littered with the wreckage of starships and all sorts of other technology, remnants of the war that seemed to be between two warring remnants themselves - "clerics", a bastion of what Christianity had morphed into over millenia, and another race, one Tasha recognised all too well.

Silents.

After adorning herself with clothes and weapons of the fallen, along with what appeared to be a device along the same lines as the nanorecorder she'd used to keep her mind in encounters with Silents in a previous life, Tasha made her way over to what appeared to be a dying Silent.

"What happened here?" she asked it.

"War," it rasped. "Holy war."

"Why?"

The Silent remained, well, silent for a time.

"You don't even know why you fought?" asked Tasha incredulously.

“We have nothing,” it responded. “We here are the last of our kind. We can’t...we don’t...our species, we are not like you. We have to do something. No purpose.”

Tasha was surprised by this. This must be before the Church of Silence, before her. She’d never considered it before, but a species with their memory abilities must be dreadfully complicated. Perhaps that was why all she’d known were religious zealots. That must give a purpose that transcended memory.

She was full of fear and disgust looking at the Silent, memories of all her interactions with them flooding her mind. But...she had to stop hiding away from sensible thoughts that entered her mind. The Silents could be enormously, enormously useful in her goal to unify religions of the universe and foster other heavens like her Library afterlife, real guaranteed heavens sentient beings could enjoy. Their powers of memory, of suggestion, nothing could be more useful. But she just could not bring herself to feel anything but hatred for the creature dying in front of her, let alone any active desire to recruit it. With memories such as hers, she couldn’t do such a thing.

But she was Tasha Lem, not River Song, not Mels, not Melody Pond.

And here was a creature that could remind her to forget.

She took a leap of faith, and let the Silent know what she was thinking. It remained quiet a long time, before responding slowly.

“I don’t know what you want me to do,” it said. “But if you tell me what to do, I can do it.”

“Make me forget what I tell you. Influence me, use your subliminal powers, make me remember everything I’ve chosen to do here in...say, a year. Every year. I can’t think rationally now, but by then I’ll have the experience with you to counteract my earlier experiences with your kind...if this works, if we can do what I plan to do together, then I’ll know this is worth it.”

The Silent did as she said. Her first disciple. Tasha Lem forgot so much, but remembered her purpose.

She dragged the Silent back to the lab she’d been reborn in, and managed to heal it. They scoured the planet for other Silents, who came to her cause even more willingly than the first. Eventually she came across dying clerics too. She healed them as well, and they were vastly more interested in what she had to say about guarantees of heaven than the Silents were. Most denounced it as heresy, but a few...a few didn’t. It was with those, along with her Silents, that Tasha left the planet, commandeering one of the Silent ships.

They travelled to the Library, which Tasha commandeered too, the entire planet essentially second nature to her after untold years living inside the data core. Lux had since perished, and people still avoided the planet out of fear for the stories of the Vashta Nerada that had spread. Tasha showed how she was able to synthesise what she'd learned of transferring consciousness with the afterlife of the data core, the very reachable heaven she'd managed to craft.

Some of the clerics whose wounds proved great to heal came to enjoy that heaven, which Tasha managed to expand vastly beyond the less ambitious conception it had been when River Song had died. She came to extract the data core from the Library planet itself, having less time for the nostalgia for books with which it'd been limited. Combined with some of the Silent starships, the data core became a portable heaven, a server for the deceased, in what came to be known as the Papal Mainframe.

The next few months saw a Tasha Lem with no memory of the Church of Silence slowly build it. She came to be venerated as the Mother Superior of the ever-expanding Papal Mainframe in the religion she simply called The Church.

When a year had passed, and her first Silent disciple granted her back her memories, Tasha gave them due consideration. Upon regaining her memories she realised, of course, that she was building the very religion that would end up kidnapping her, brainwashing her, and try to kill the Doctor.

But for her, those events had already happened and resulted in this, the salvation of now millions of beings. She was caught in a destiny trap, engineering history she was part of, meaning she couldn't change it even if she wanted to. And she didn't want to, both for awareness of how disastrous the effects of trying to change time could be, and for knowing how much genuine value she was bringing to people.

So, to maintain the never-ending bootstrap paradox of her own existence - from her mother naming her after her, to founding the very religion that would essentially end up spawning her existence as it was - she continued having Silents suppress her memories of aspects of her lives that would interfere with the apparent free will factor of her actions.

However her religion would eventually end up morphing into a church dedicated against the Doctor, she wanted to arrive there organically under whatever reasons she'd end up having, instead of simply walking the mindless deterministic steps she'd walk if she knew that was where it was destined. After a previous life that had spent so long wallowing in memories, Tasha found it liberating to weaponise the ability to forget. She was her own woman, and if it took forgetting the women she had been to be so, so be it.

Tasha found what the Silents could do for her impactful enough that she encouraged others to use similar services. To that end, she christened them as Confessional Priests, maintaining the genetic engineering (for they could not reproduce naturally, so new Silents required a more creative process) that enabled people to confess their sins to them without remembering doing so, absolving people of their guilt while also subliminally equipping them to make the actual actions necessary to atone for it. Voluntarily entered into, of course.

If people declined, the Silents just sent them on their way, which inevitably meant they forgot having denied them anyway. Most people, however, accepted. Memories were a powerful currency, not just to keep, but to discard as well. Tasha preached against employing their services unduly, knowing memories were integral to development of character, but she respected the agency of her acolytes as well.

Years and years passed, and the Church grew and grew, becoming an interfaith religion, a vast concatenation of religions from all over the universe, their union under Tasha enjoying great peace and popularity. That popularity saw a lot of naked people coming to church, for Tasha preached that it was only through nudity that one could purely prostrate themselves. Her quiet amusement at the easy pun in that stricture was generally lost on the devout.

In time, Tasha grew the Church to contain and coordinate not just different sects, but different afterlives. There was the Testimony Foundation, created by a fellow professor, Helen Clay of the University of New Earth. Her service saw the dead give their memories, their consciousness, their testimony so others could learn from them. In exchange, they lived again as glass avatars that could interact with the living. As ever, debates raged on whether consciousness transfer in that fashion actually preserved the original life, but it was a popular service among many, so much so that it even expanded into entertainment services off the back of the more interesting memories it collected.

Tasha was particularly fond of the Testimony Foundation, which had integrated very peacefully and neatly into the Church, but it was not the only alternate afterlife service offered. There was also the Nethersphere, a more nebulous, dubious post-life virtual reality. The coordinator of the Nethersphere reminded Tasha too much of herself for either of their own good, so she merely coordinated it as an alternate afterlife service rather than giving it an official blessing. But, if people could afford a level five heresy and indulge themselves, they were welcome to employ the Nethersphere's services.

Tasha did take some inspiration from how the Nethersphere used simulated ethical dilemmas, though she abhorred how the result there was voluntarily divestment of emotions instead of the more humane reconfiguring of self via memory manipulation

that she endorsed. Still, simulated ethical dilemmas determining quality of one's afterlife was popular with some of the sects under her wing, particularly remnants of many human religions, and more masochistic types like the Headless Monks.

There were other afterlife services offered, but things became messy after the first holy civil war where multiple post-life afterlife versions of a person fought over the state of their soul. Tasha had to clamp down much more heavily on just how much post-ghosts, as she thought of them, could interact with the living world after that, a fact the Testimony Foundation chafed at.

Tasha took it as a challenge though - how meaningful and enjoyable did she have to make her heavens in order for people to want to stay in them, and not come out and cause trouble for the living? She quietly ignored how that might apply to herself. She was a pope, after all - she'd earned a little hypocrisy by now.

Her dealing with those holy civil wars over various afterlives and the apparent souls that inhabited them so well had handled so well that multiple civilisations were amenable to the Church's influence expanding, as it came to function more and more as a security hub to forestall, prevent, and solve conflicts instead of merely offering salvation for those involved in them.

Having an entirely different appearance to River Song, and a personality at least somewhat different (she thought of herself as much more imperious and haughty, which she regarded as admirable qualities in a pope), Tasha didn't hide away from interactions with the Doctor when they happened now and again. She never interacted with the Eleventh Doctor, discouraged to out of the temporal complications his involvement with the Church could present, but had more than a few amorous encounters with earlier Doctors. She was particularly fond of the Sixth.

One day, at the height of the Church's influence, the universe was stricken with dread as a wordless message emanated resoundingly from a planet Tasha recognised very well. All too well, in fact, so much so that she had a Silent suppress her memories of what would happen in that planet's future, so she could make her contact with the Doctor regarding the problem it presently presented organically, and not get too caught in a destiny trap. She did this because the planet was where she knew the Doctor would eventually fall for the last time.

Trenzalore.

THE TIME OF THE DOCTOR

“Once, there was a planet much like any other, and unimportant. The planet sent the universe a message. A bell tolling among the stars, ringing out to all the dark corners of creation. And everybody came to see. Although no one understood the message, everyone who heard it found themselves afraid. Except one man. The man who stayed for Christmas.”

Keeping a diary was a habit Tasha had not managed to, nor wanted to, shake from an earlier life. When it came to the Doctor, it was helpful to write things down, especially when consulting with a Silent and sifting through the memories she’d periodically suppress.

Tasha had stationed the Papal Mainframe above Trenzalore, where it was joined by several ships of several species. None had any idea what the message meant, but all felt dread of terrible scale upon hearing it. It didn’t take too long for the Doctor to come investigate, and Tasha accordingly invited him onboard to discuss the matter.

It was the Eleventh Doctor and Clara Oswald that walked down the long hall to Tasha Lem, talking amongst themselves as they did, holographic projections shielding their nudity. Tasha could hear them whisper as they came closer.

“The Church of the Papal Mainframe,” the Doctor explained to Clara, “security hub of the known universe.”

“A security church?”

“Yep. Keeping you safe in this world and the next. I venerate the exaltation of the Mother Superious.”

He bowed, and Clara curtsied, as they came up to her at last.

“Welcome to the Church of the Papal Mainframe,” said Colonel Albero. “Your nudity is appreciated.”

Tasha was curious whether this Doctor would realise she had been River Song in a previous life. The others couldn’t, as they didn’t remember interacting with River in the first place. If the Twelfth Doctor were here, the one she’d spent twenty-four years with, Tasha was confident he’d recognise her instantly, quite unlike the way she hadn’t recognised him for so long into their first meeting. But the Eleventh... Tasha was unsure what would happen.

“Hey babes,” he said, demonstrating exactly what would happen. “Loving the frock.”

“Is that a new body?” she asked. “Give us a twirl.”

“Tash, this old thing? Please, I’ve been rocking it for centuries.”

“Nice though. Tight.”

“So, er hello,” said Clara. “Also here.”

“Clara, this is Tasha Lem, the Head of the Church of the Papal Mainframe. Tash, ho, ho, ho, ho, this is my, my associate, Clara Oswald. Ms. Clara Oswald.”

“We’ll go to my chapel. All honours in place, no sacrifices required.”

“It was Tasha who shielded the planet,” the Doctor explained to Clara as the three of them walked down the corridor to her chapel. “But you could sneak me down there, couldn’t you Tash?”

“I would have conditions,” she said, before turning to Clara. “I have confidential matters to discuss with the Doctor. Would you excuse us?”

“Anything you have to say to me, you can say in front of Clara. Well, quite a lot of it. Probably about half. Maybe a smidge under. Actually, Clara, would you mind waiting out here, please?”

“No worries, you two get yourselves a room.”

“Yes, quite. No, stop it.”

“Boss of the psycho space nuns - so you.”

Tasha and the Doctor entered her private chapel.

“Well, that altar looks like a bed,” he said.

“That bed looks like an altar.”

“Yep,” he said, sitting on it.

She offered him a drink, which he tried, but did not like. She activated the message from Trenzalore so he could hear it.

“That message is transmitting through all of space and time. What did it make you feel?”

“Feel?”

“Every sentient being in the universe who detected that signal felt something. Something overpowering.”

“What?”

“Fear. Pure, unadulterated dread.”

“Right. What’s the signal? Where’s it coming from?”

“It’s a settlement. Human colony, level two. A farm, basically.”

“Right. Anyone been for a look?”

“Any one ship lands, the rest will follow. There will be bloodshed. Fortunately we got here first, shielded the planet. We maintain the truce by blocking all of them”

“Daleks, Cybermen, one of that lot, could break through your defences.”

“Perhaps. But they’re afraid, remember? Nobody wants to go first.”

She wondered if he would catch that reference to his speech atop Stonehenge, back soon before the Pandorica opened.

“I do,” he said, not indicating either way.

“I was counting on it.”

Clara burst into the chapel suddenly.

“Are you okay?”

“Fine. Yeah, fine. Sorry.”

“Right,” said Tasha, “this is my personal teleport. I can put you down just outside the town. Find the source of the message and report back to me in one hour. And on your life Doctor, you will cause no trouble down there.”

“When do I?” asked the Doctor, entering the confessional-style teleport box of hers.

“Don’t answer that.”

As he drew the teleport’s curtain, Tasha pulled it back and held out her hand.

“What?”

“I’m not an idiot. Everyone in this church is trained to see straight through holograms.”

“Ah, great,” said Clara.

“Give now,” she said, meaning the TARDIS key. “You are taking no technology of any kind down there.”

“What can I do with a key?” he said before turning to Clara. “You, in, now.”

“You could summon your TARDIS.”

“The TARDIS doesn’t work by remote. Fine. If it makes you feel any better, there we are.”

He handed over the key as Clara walked into the other cubicle.

“Remember,” said Tasha, working the teleport controls, “I want you back in one hour.”

Some time passed, before the Trenzalore message stopped being an unintelligible warble and morphed into two very distinct words. A question.

“Doctor who? Doctor who? Doctor who? Doctor who?”

“Patch me through to the Doctor,” Tasha commanded a colonel. “Now!”

Her face was holographically projected down onto the planet’s surface, outside the clocktower the Doctor was residing in.

“Doctor. Speak with me. Doctor! Face me now! Doctor!”

The Doctor appeared up outside the bell chamber above the clock face.

“Mother Superior, there is only one thing I need from you. This planet, what’s it called?”

“Trenzalore.”

He looked utterly shaken by that. Tasha wasn’t sure why. It wasn’t a planet she could remember ever having been on before, and any significance it had on him was lost on her. They exchanged a few further words about the nature of the dilemma they’d presented with, both coming to the common understanding that it was the Time Lords asking for verification the universe was safe to reenter, before she had to begin emphasising the seriousness of the situation to him.

“If you speak your name,” she continued, “the Time Lords will return.”

“If they return, they will come in peace.”

"It doesn't matter. They will be met with a war that will never end. The Time War will begin anew. You know that, Doctor."

"They're asking for my help!"

"And if you give it, war will be the consequence. I will not let that happen, at any cost. Speak your name and this world will burn."

"No," he said, ringing the clocktower's bell, "this planet is protected."

Tasha stopped projecting herself holographically to him, and summoned everyone else with authority present in the Papal Mainframe to her, to make an announcement she'd broadcast across all those of her church.

The Time Lords - namely, one Time Lord - had presented them with an impossible situation. No matter if the Time Lords meant to return peacefully or not (and even if they did, Tasha had heard enough about them to doubt they'd stay that way for very long at all), their presence would immediately plunge a universe too familiar with their actions into another Time War, to prevent them from ever affecting others again. The fact the verification they wanted to reenter the universe was the Doctor responding with a name only he and Tasha knew complicated things massively...now, so many would focus on not just trying to level the town of Christmas below, so there was no more gateway for the Time Lords to ask for reentry through, but on trying to kill the Doctor as well, so there never could be any response to the question they were asking.

Tasha could not brook either of those options. The Time Lords could not be let through, much as the Doctor might be tempted, but, to prevent their return, there was a better solution than killing the Doctor.

Ensuring the Doctor's silence.

"Attention," said Tasha. "Attention all Chapels and Choirs of the Papal Mainframe. The siege of Trenzalore is now begun. There will now be an unscheduled faith change. From this moment on, I dedicate this church to one cause - silence. The Doctor will not speak his name, and war will not begin. Silence will fall!"

"Silence will fall!" came the heard voices of those physically with her on the ship, as well of the unheard voices of countless of the faithful across the universe. "Silence will fall!"

“In the time that followed, the Papal Mainframe strove to maintain the peace between the Doctor and his enemies. As the days passed, and the years, the Doctor stayed true to his word. On the fields of Trenzalore, he stood as protector both of his own people and his new home. Over the years, his foes would find new, stranger ways to enter the town called Christmas. With every victory, the town celebrated. In time, the Doctor seemed to forget he’d lived any other life. And the people of the town came to love the man who stayed for Christmas.”

Writing in her diary reminded Tasha of the temporal tangles the Siege of Trenzalore produced. So much time had passed that even the Doctor had visibly aged. They were all engaged in a stalemate, but Tasha knew this had to end at some point. There was another Doctor after the Eleventh, one she’d spent twenty-four blissful years with on Darillium, years she wouldn’t trade for anything.

“Not those times,” River Song had said to the Tenth Doctor when he’s brought up the idea of rewriting time in such a way that those years on Darillium would be made non-existent. “Not one line. Don’t you dare.”

Tasha held to that now, not just for the emotional truth of it, but how devastating the impacts of temporal entanglements could be. Time breaking at Lake Silencio, the Time War and the untold devastation it had had on countless lives across time and space, paradoxes that would wipe people out of existence so thoroughly they could never even reach the heavens that she fostered, she could not allow any more events like this. So, at some point the siege had to finish, and the Doctor had to regenerate.

But how? She remembered arguing with the Eleventh Doctor over whether all the regenerations he’d had counted as full uses of his regeneration energy. She maintained that his offshoot regeneration into another Tenth Doctor of sorts counted as a full regeneration, whereas he’d insisted it didn’t. She believed he was simply denying that he was to be the last Doctor, but as for most of her years as River she never came across any Twelfth Doctor, eventually figured he was probably correct in the end.

But eventually she had had met the Twelfth Doctor, so figured she’d been right all along...except, on Darillium, he occasionally made comments that made it sound like he had the potential for more regenerations. She hadn’t pressed him on that, both of them wanting to simply enjoy each other in the present without thinking of their futures, but now, it made her wonder.

Perhaps she’d given him more regenerations than she’d thought, when she’d transferred her remaining regeneration energy to him on that first day of the River Song incarnation, where she’d made to assassinate the Doctor? Perhaps he might have

simply worked out some sort of way to gain more regenerations in all his years on Trenzalore? Perhaps the Time Lords would somehow manage to transfer him more regenerations...but wouldn't that require active communication with the Doctor, which would end the siege by giving them the implicit go-ahead it was indeed the Doctor on the other side and thus safe to come through?

That either his offshoot Tenth regeneration hadn't counted, or she'd given him more regenerations than she'd thought were the simplest explanations, but neither answered how the siege would eventually end and he would go free to eventually become the Doctor she'd live with on Darillium.

She met with the Doctor as he was on Trenzalore semi-frequently, where both of them would talk in circles, aware neither really had a satisfactory solution for the siege. What she now remembered and knew, that he didn't, was that Trenzalore would eventually be the site of his grave.

That fact confused her. She'd seen it with her own eyes, saw the utter truth of it, but knew there was a Doctor beyond the Eleventh that had seemed entirely unconcerned with Trenzalore. If the Doctor eventually died in the Siege of Trenzalore, how did the Twelfth Doctor come about? Was the siege eventually resolved, and a later Doctor eventually came back to Trenzalore in a different conflict, and perished that way? It seemed a stretch, but she was hopeful for this siege not to end in bloodshed even if it meant some future one did, and she was short on other ideas.

Perhaps the Doctor would come to fashion another duplicate sort of regeneration like he had as the Tenth Doctor, and one stayed, protected Trenzalore, and eventually perished there, while the other continued on to become the Doctor she'd spend twenty-fours with. That seemed more feasible to her, though unsettling.

Perhaps she was currently caught in two separate timelines rubbing up against each other, the same way she had been after the Pandorica opened but before the universe was rebooted, and when she'd refused to shoot the Teselecta at Lake Silencio. Perhaps the Twelfth Doctor was the product of a timeline where the Doctor didn't die on Trenzalore, and she was simply caught in the middle of a timeline that had yet to resolve. The involvement of the Time Lords had her seriously considering that as a possibility, but it was no excuse to lapse and treat the situation like it would eventually resolve by itself.

What made things even more complicated was that her own religion had partially rebelled against her. One of her most important authority figures in the Church, Madame Kovarian, formed a splinter sect, taking with her many followers. Far too many Silents

for comfort, Colonel Manton, a cluster of Headless Monks, far too many regular followers of various species, and even rudimentary time travel technology, it was a devastating loss for the Church. They had travelled back in time with the plan to kill the Doctor before he ever came to Trenzalore, ensuring the Time Lords never returned by proxy.

They fell into a destiny trap, chronic hysteresis, a paradox greater than they knew, for not only in their attempts to blow up the Doctor's TARDIS did they create the very cracks in the universe the Time Lords would eventually ask their question at Trenzalore through, they also kidnapped the earliest form Tasha had ever been, baby Melody Pond, and tried to raise her into a psychopath that would kill the Doctor.

In her final yearly meeting with a Silent that would restore her memories suppressed for temporal stability, Tasha was overcome by the sheer magnitude to which her entire existence was a self-fulfilling prophecy, a bootstrap paradox. The significance with which it could be considered divine wasn't lost on her, but the totality of it felt constraining. There was no need to suppress any memories any longer, in light of those revelations.

Any providence she'd thought bestowed upon herself was negated when the Daleks, ever-increasing in numbers and capabilities, attacked the Papal Mainframe itself.

The slow whittling down of other species present above Trenzalore, hoping to prevent the return of the Time Lords by any means possible, had made the situation resemble the actual Time War more and more, as it came to more closely resemble a stalemate between the Time Lords and the Daleks once again. They were built for this in a way none of the others hovering above Trenzalore were. Their aptitude at such conflicts and the terrifying scale with which they'd managed to craft themselves anew saw them slaughter the inhabitants of the Papal Mainframe, filling its heavens with those who had no plans on reaching them anytime soon.

Tasha ended up the last one standing, as the Daleks made their way into her private chapel.

"Doctor!" she screamed as they advanced. She tried desperately to activate her communications channels, but the Daleks had disabled them all. He couldn't hear her, but she screamed out his name all the same. "Doctor! Doctor!"

She was zapped by multiple Dalek gunsticks at once. Electricity ran through her. Memories of all her lives jolted through her head. A blinding light flashed.

Tasha awoke, the last three days a distant blur in her mind that she couldn't quite remember. Something had happened to her, but she couldn't recall what. She figured she'd had a Silent subliminally influence her behaviour and, as usual, trusted that she knew what was doing.

She dwelt on how her legitimate lack of knowledge on how the siege would resolve. It tugged at her. Maybe she needed to be more proactive. Or maybe she needed to have more faith.

She decided to do both. She'd put her faith in the Doctor, and proactively contact him.

"Doctor," she boomed as a holographic projection down on the planet's surface, "the Church of the Silence requests parley. Your rights and safety are sanctified."

"I'll be right up."

"I'm sending a transporter."

"Nah, don't bother. I've got me motor back."

He'd sent his TARDIS away with Clara inside a long, long time ago, but Tasha had noticed she was on the clocktower with him, so it only stood to reason the TARDIS had returned as well. A companion commandeering the TARDIS to return to a Doctor that had abandoned them, hoping that it would protect them? Quite right.

"She hasn't aged much," Tasha heard Clara whisper as she walked with the Doctor down a corridor to Tasha for the second time.

"No, she's against ageing."

"Approach," said Tasha.

"Confess," said a Silent.

"What are those things?" asked Clara.

"Confess."

"Confessional priests," explained the Doctor. "Very popular. Genetically engineered so you forget everything you told them."

"Told who?"

“There you go.”

Inside the chapel, Tasha placed a big box of marshmallows in front of the Doctor. A regular transaction.

“Satisfactory?” she asked.

“Where are the pink ones?”

“E-numbers. You’re hyper enough as it is.”

“So, this is sweet. Middle of a siege, and you two have little chats?”

“She’s right. This situation cannot continue.”

“It can’t end either.”

“Why did you ever come to Trenzalore?”

“Well, I did come to Trenzalore, and nothing can change that now. Didn’t stop you trying though, did it?”

“Not me. The Kovarian Chapter broke away. They travelled back along your timeline and tried to prevent you ever reaching Trenzalore.”

“So that’s who blew up my TARDIS. I thought I’d left the bath running.”

“They blew up your time capsule, created the very cracks in the universe through which the Time Lords are now calling.”

“The destiny trap. You can’t change history if you’re part of it.”

“They engineered a psychopath to kill you,” said Tasha, eyeing the Doctor carefully for a reaction. He still hadn’t indicated overtly that he knew, or even suspected, who she was, but at times she wondered.

“Totally married her,” he said, meeting her eyes pointedly. “I’d never have made it here alive without River Song.”

“I’m not interested in changing history, Doctor. I want to change the future. The Daleks send for reinforcements daily. They are massing for war. Three days ago, they attacked the Mainframe itself.”

“They attacked here?”

“How did you stop them?”

“Stop them? It was slaughter.”

“Why didn't you call me? I could have helped.”

“I tried. I died in this room, screaming your name.”

“No...”

“Oh. I died. It's funny the things that slip your mind. Ah!” she cried out, as a Dalek eyestalk emerged from her forehead, and understanding she'd died and been converted into a Dalek puppet came to her. No, not even died; died multiple times. They'd resurrected her as a Dalek puppet multiple times before she'd finally acquiesced to their will. That's why it'd taken them three days to get her to contact the Doctor, luring him into this trap.

“No! No, no, no. Tasha, no, please, not Tasha. No. Fight it. Tash, fight it!”

“Step away from the Dalek unit, Doctor,” said an actual Dalek as multiple of them came into the chapel.

“You shouldn't even know who I am.”

“Information concerning the Doctor was harvested from the cadaver of Tasha Lem.”

“Bet she never told you how to break through the Trenzalore forcefield, though. She'd have died first.”

“Several times.”

“Well, you'd better kill me, then. Go on. But before you do,” he said, using his sonic screwdriver to activate the broadcast of the Time Lord's question into the room, “I'm a tough old bird. I'll be ages dying. Way enough time to answer a question. And, oh dear, what happens then, boys?”

Tasha grabbed Clara's neck from behind, newfound energy coursing through her hands.

“You will die in silence, Doctor, or your associate will die.”

“Fine, go on, kill her. Kill her! See if I care. But tell me, what you are going to do next?”

“See how the Time Lord betrays.”

“You'll kill me anyway,” said Clara. “What difference does it make? I'm not afraid. I'll leave that to you.”

"You see, Tasha, that's what I'm talking about. That is a woman! I always knew you were a bit spineless, you and your pointless church. Why did I ever rely on you? Never trust a nun to do a Doctor's work."

Tasha turned on the Doctor, releasing Clara so that she could slap him. Then she turned the energy ripping over her hands on the Daleks, bursting them into flame.

"And she's back!" said the Doctor, kissing Tasha. Her eyestalk responded by receding back into her forehead, leaving a scar.

"You never could resist a row," he continued.

"Kiss me when I ask," she reprimanded him.

"Well, you'd better ask nicely."

"In your dreams."

"Right, get us back to the TARIS. Can you do that?"

"Yeah, but quickly, the Dalek inside me is waking."

"Fight it."

"I can't."

"Listen to me. You have been fighting the psychopath inside you all your life. Shut up and win. That is an order, Tasha Lem."

The psychopath inside her.

He did remember.

"The forcefield will hold for a while," she told the Doctor and Clara as they climbed into her teleportation booths, "but it will decay, and there are breaches already."

"Then this isn't a siege any more, it's a war. It's all up to you now. Fight the Daleks, inside and out. You can do it, I know you can."

"Oh, I see. You've got your TARDIS back, haven't you? Time to fly away."

"Tasha, please. Please. Thank you."

"None of this was for you, you fatuous egotist. It was for the peace. Fly away, Doctor!"

Tasha saw the TARDIS leave Trenzalore, then return. She wondered if the Doctor was thinking the same thing she was now - of Trenzalore as it was in the future perhaps not

being so distant now. It was warfare now. The TARDIS was back, perhaps ready to eventually size-leak and become his tomb. The issue of the Twelfth Doctor tugged at her, but the explanations she'd thought of - this battle not being the final battle, the involvement of some sort of clone Doctor, or that entire Trenzalore grave timeline being negated soon - played in her head as well. In any case, now was not the time for such thoughts.

Now was the time for war.

"And so, to the fields of Trenzalore came all the Time Lord's enemies. For this was the winter of the Doctor. In time, when all other races had retreated or burned, only the Church of the Mainframe remained in the path of the Daleks. And so those ancient enemies, the Doctor and the Silence, stood back to back on the fields of Trenzalore."

Tasha wondered if this would be the last entry in her diary. Apart from the tangled issue of the Twelfth Doctor, she had no idea how events resolved from her. She felt equal parts powerless and liberated by how she had nearly no indication of future events, remembered or otherwise, for once.

Events were drawing near a close. She remembered how the Doctor had referred to the apparent psychopath inside her. It reminded her of something he'd said to her on Trenzalore in the future

"You are always here to me," he had said. "And I always listen, and I can always see you."

"Then why didn't you speak to me?" River Song's echo had replied.

"Because I thought it would hurt too much."

"I believe I could have coped."

"No, I thought it would hurt me. And I was right."

Tasha didn't think that exchange on Trenzalore was so far away anymore. The Doctor had become so, so old that death of a form he hadn't experienced since his first body waited for him. Regardless of what happened to him - whether Tasha had misjudged things and this really was his ultimate end somehow or whether he had another regeneration in store and this was merely the end of the Eleventh Doctor - he shouldn't die alone.

Tasha didn't think she should be the one to be with him as he died, not only out of fear that her latent Dalek self was reactivate or that she'd cause some sort of temporal anomaly on the planet's surface, but also because she remembered how wonderfully and thoroughly Clara managed to save him in Trenzalore's future and the Doctor's past. Perhaps she could do it again.

So, she commandeered the TARDIS, brought it to Clara, and was joined by a Clara disappointed to see Tasha steering the TARDIS instead of the Doctor.

"You can fly the TARDIS?"

"Flying the TARDIS was always easy. It was flying the Doctor I never quite mastered."

"What's happened to him?"

Tasha didn't answer, electing to let the state of Christmas show Clara for herself. The town was in flames as the Dalek assault advanced further than it ever had before, and the Doctor was too old to be able to protect them as he once had.

"What am I supposed to do?" Clara asked.

"He shouldn't die alone. Go to him."

Tasha had herself teleported back to the Papal Mainframe, where it was imperative she continued keeping the Daleks from entering it once again.

For some time, nothing happened. Then, the message stopped. The Time Lords had ceased broadcasting their message.

Tasha's ensuing hopes were met with the sky lighting up with the crack from her mother's bedroom, and the Doctor began to glow atop the clocktower. Daleks swarmed around him, but all seemed too apprehensive to actually shoot him. Tasha remembered all the conversations she'd had with the Doctor about the effects of weaponising his reputation.

The Doctor exploded, the colossal scale of his regeneration destroying the Dalek mothership above him. Not long after the Daleks were defeated, she saw the TARDIS dematerialise away.

She smiled. Trenzalore, but with no Doctor, no TARDIS. No Time Lords. A timeline averted. A Time War avoided. A siege ended.

NEXT STOP EVERYWHERE

The Siege of Trenzalore had ended, but what remained was Tasha herself. Tasha...but not enough of Tasha.

Focusing on the siege had helped her keep the Dalek inside her at bay, but the siege was over now, and she knew she couldn't fight it forever. This body was of no more use. Tasha Lem had to die, again - but that didn't mean it was the exactly the end for her.

She'd built a religion around resurrection, heavens, life after death. It would be far from the first time she regenerated herself, one way or another.

She was free now. No more paradoxes, no more loops, no more matters of temporal causality. All her tangles with the Doctor's timeline, even just knowledge of the Doctor's timeline, had concluded. For the first time in all her lives she was no longer a paradox. Liberated of the chronic hysteresis that had been with her for every previous life, she was ready to start anew, finally free.

The Papal Mainframe was damaged. She didn't know if it would be able to transfer her consciousness successfully as it had done from River Song's echo to that dormant body named Tasha. Further, the range capabilities were too severely affected by the Dalek attack to even transfer her consciousness to a specific body. It could relay the consciousness outwards, but she had no idea if it would hit another dormant as would be ideal, or whether it would hit and reanimate a corpse of any of the species littering Trenzalore's battlefields, or whether it would beam to the other side of the universe. She didn't even know if the signal would remain constrained to this timezone.

So many issues, but she didn't have the luxury of waiting to fix it, as the Dalek within her grew stronger and stronger. She wondered how the Church would cope. It was severely devastated, but not only would be of no use to any adherents as a Dalek-possessed walking corpse, she'd be an active danger. She hoped she'd find her way back to the Church if the resurrection worked and she made her way into a next life, but if she didn't...well, she had to hope those who remained would be able to heal, and build on the heavens she had made.

What remained of Tasha Lem made her way to the chamber of the Papal Mainframe that had once been the room where River Song had died in front of the Tenth Doctor. As it was then, so it was now, two cables beneath a chair. She operated the controls, readying the computer for what she was about to attempt. The amount of failing systems...this was a gamble. She didn't know whether this would work, but she knew she wanted to try.

She chose to take a leap of faith.

She joined the two cables. Electricity ran through her. Memories of all her lives jolted through her head. A blinding light flashed.

Framing Story: Part 13

Constriction

by Neo

"I've found it."

Gwen sprang up. Jack was holding up a tape triumphantly.

"What is called?" she asked.

"Framing Story."

"And this has all the answers, does it? Go on then, put it on."

The whirring of reels of tape sliding around within the videotapes thrown around the floor was the loudest it had gotten yet, but Gwen realised that was immaterial now - there wasn't any dialogue to actually hear, any video to actually watch. Just words.

So, they read. A dream of Gwen's. A note of Jack's. A message from Tosh. A shadow that came and went. Owen vanishing. Jack blustering. Arguments. And always, tapes sliding around, reels actively spinning despite laying untouched on the floor.

When the words started covering the conversation they'd had prior to watching the tape, Jack ejected it from the player.

"Tosh said none of this actually happened," said Gwen. "So why stop the tape? That stuff with my dad, with the Doctor, that shadow, none of that actually happened, yeah? So why stop the tape playing?"

"Why believe the tape?"

"Why believe Tosh, you mean. If none of this is real, then why not get it over with and let the tape finish?"

"I prefer having some kind of control. I thought I'd changed the beginning of that tape, but it changed back."

"What do you mean?"

"Earlier I figured there was something up with reality here, that were were in some sort of enclosed, I don't know, simulation? Mind game? That tape seemed to be the source. I

figured, tape's physical, can't be that hard to tinker with, and that's what I tried to do. That stuff you mentioned, I thought I could get rid of it, neutralise that shadow before it even became a problem."

"But we read you did that. It was inside the story."

"Yeah. That's what we're dealing with. Have I ever told you about the Weeping Angels?"

"No."

"Nasty bunch. Time Agency had more than a few run-ins with them. They look like statues of angels, stone angels, but they're actually quantum-locked predators, able to send you way back in time just by touching you. Not something I've ever had much patience for."

"Seriously? You're you, and you're saying that?"

"Hey, I never do it by choice. Anyway, these Angels, the deadliest thing about them is they can embed themselves into people's minds. The image of Angel is an Angel. Literally."

"So," said Gwen, catching on, "these tapes then, you think they're not just stories?"

"Oh, they're stories alright. That's exactly what they are. Not tapes, not recordings, not copies. They're the stories themselves."

"Well, you couldn't edit it, so how do we get out of this one then?"

"Like this," said Jack, throwing the Framing Room tape to the ground and crushing it with his boots.

Immediately the air came alive with noise as every tape in the room began to hiss. The reels of the crushed tapes at Jack's feet whipped out in a serpentine kind of motion, wrapping themselves around them him.

He tried to kick the tapes off around his boots, but they seemed to just cling tighter. Gwen went over to his feet and tried to pull them off herself but they were too tight.

"Stay back," Jack said, waddling off across to the other side of the room.

"Shouldn't have destroying the tapes got us out of here and back home? Ended the whole nightmare?"

"It still will," said Jack, scrambling in his coat. He pulled out a lighter and grinned. "Watch."

He set the reels coiling around his feet alight. Suddenly, tape seemed to explode out of the shelves surrounding them, reels escaping their cases to clamp down over the burning reels twisted around Jack's feet.

"Oh god," said Gwen.

From all around the room reels of tape burst out from their cassettes, from their cases. They tangled themselves around Jack, throwing themselves at him as if they were snakes lunging at their prey. The hissing sound grew louder and louder as they slithered around the room, contorting themselves around Jack.

"Jack!" Gwen yelled as she went to run over to him, but then a long reel of tape stretched out taut in front of her feet and she tripped over, hitting the ground with a painful thud.

Head sideways, she saw Jack toppled over as well. She tried to get up and make her way over to him, but more and more reels rushed at her too, pulling her body to the ground. As she pulled at them with her hands, blissfully still free, she saw a bundle of reels all twisted together like a rat king thrust itself into Jack's mouth.

His eyes bulged, and he tried to yell, but more and more thinner individual reels of tape slid into his mouth as well, and any sounds that he might have been trying to make were muffled at once.

"Jack! Jack!"

She squirmed, dragging her shoulders across the ground as she inched towards him. The tapes seemed far more interested in him than her, but she still had to contend with reels wrapped tightly around her feet and chest.

What seemed like all the remaining tapes in the room had wriggled over to Jack. They looked like a mass of long black worms, undulating, swelling, rippling. They surged across Jack's body until all that was visible was his face, still being stuffed by masses of flowing black ribbon.

Then, he stopped struggling, completely, the fear in his eyes turning to a glassy nothingness as death came to him. The coiling tape didn't stop, and a few seconds later he jerked back to life again. The closer she dragged herself over to him, the more this process repeated itself, his body pumped full of writhing worms of cassette tape for a

few seconds of deathly respite, only for him to be resurrected again, born in fear and agony.

As Gwen looked on in horror, desperately trying to slide over closer to him, she saw that it looked like tape was coming out of his mouth, not just rushing into it. Worms burrowed into his mouth just as snakes emanated from it. Soon enough he seemed to be retching up impossible amounts of tape, like an endless vomit of black noodles, like his mouth was a grater with countless dark mass behind it.

Forcing herself to breathe, Gwen realised there was nothing she could do for him. Not like this, not now. She had to work out how to get out of here. What were the tapes, exactly? Jack had said they were the stories they held, but Jack was nearly unrecognisable as swirling black tendrils erupted from him as much as they slithered into him.

She thought on how evasive Jack had acted as he'd tried to let Gwen come to her own conclusions about their predicament, to realise the tapes were barely tapes at all. Only...had he really let her come to her own conclusions? Between his comments on the stories and his efforts to keep himself lodged in Gwen's mind for his own safety, she'd barely approached any of the stories with an uncluttered mind. She'd even really liked some of them. If she'd read them at home with a glass of wine, instead of seen them projected as cassettes in this damned room...

"They're not tapes," she realised. "They're not tapes."

The last story, the Framing Story, that was this room, that was the tapes. None of the other stories were even about tapes. They were all contained to this room, this house, this domain. The only place sentences, short stories, novellas, pictures, the only place any of that could seem like a videotape was in this room when that was how they were presented to her. When that was how they were framed to her.

She thought that revelation would be the key to getting out of here, but nothing had changed. No doors had opened. Tapes still coiled in and out of Jack. The only difference was that the room was filling up as more and more cases flew off shelves, more and more tapes broke free, and more and more spewed out of Jack's mouth. Gwen thought, madly, that it almost seemed like they wanted to extract more and more tape out of Jack just to have more tape in the room, more under their control.

They came for her. A sea of writhing black worms twisting and tying themselves down her legs, cutting off circulation.

She finally managed to struggle enough against the snake against her chest to bring herself waist-up, but then a line of taut tape slammed into her forehead, pulling back down onto the floor. Her head crashed down forcefully enough she thought she could feel the slickness of blood behind her hair.

As she opened her mouth in an involuntary gasp of pain, one of the strings of cassette thrashing around her slid down her throat. She gagged, but that just seemed to invite another in. Then another, and another, and another.

Tears welled in her eyes, some from the pain, some from the realisation she was never getting out of here. She was trapped as soon as she walked in. She was trapped as soon as she'd had that dream.

She grew more and more dizzy as the snakes pulled tighter and tighter around her body, constricting more and more bloodflow. Worms burrowed further and further down her mouth until she couldn't breathe at all. She could almost feel them reaching down into her stomach, but as the snakes wrapped around her pulled tighter, she stopped being able to feel anything at all.

Gwen thought of Rhys. Gwen thought of Jack. Gwen thought of the dream and the tape that had brought her here.

Then Gwen thought no more.

The End

An Unexpected Sequel

A last minute Shit Trips 2.5 Epilogue

by Mr. Offerino

What if famed fanfilm 'The Auton Stratagem' received a prose sequel penned by its very own Doctor?

Late eighties feel-good Rock plays as stock explosions crisscross a well-forested public park in cloudy Seattle afternoon as three familiar figures scramble wildly across the screen.

They're uncomfortably familiar but not immediately recognizable, and slightly hard to place, like when you see someone in a crowd and realize oh fuck we went to school together when I was like, ten. The camera cuts to a shot of the trio and it's suddenly clear who they are – the Auton Stratagem Doctor and his two nameless companions, clearly slightly older and less fresh-faced than the last time they were on camera. They're running from a danger that stays conspicuously off-camera.

"Where are we going?" the female companion asks, in a half-hearted attempt at a pan-British accent.

"Where do you think?" her male compatriot snaps back, keeping pace beside her, as the cameraman audibly runs out of breath.

The Doctor yells "To the Tardis, of course!" as the camera snaps back to a view of the three of them from the front. They're far off in the distance at the bottom of the hill, almost out of focus, running towards a toy police box that takes up half the shot. In a criminally poor example of forced perspective, the triumphant trio make their way into the toy Tardis, and it takes off as one last explosion blooms in the public park, leaving behind a complete lack of debris or damage on the ground.

The inside of the Tardis is unlike the last time it was seen. Instead of an old RV, it's now clearly shot on an improvised green screen, the console room itself partially finished, mostly undetailed, and clearly made in a 3D modelling program obtained for free. The

three do their best to act as though they're actually inhabiting the space, and it almost works. Almost.

The two companions pant and catch their breath as the Doctor does his best to realistically pull a few levers and a turn a few dials. After a few moments, the sound of the Tardis fills the air, drowning out the noticeably looped audio clip of Tardis's familiar background hum.

"Who was that chasing us?" The male companion manages between labored breaths.

"I'm not altogether sure," the Doctor says, checking a nonexistent screen. "But I think I know who to ask!" He gives them a knowing look that they don't return at all.

"The Master?" The female companion asks.

"Er, no. Not the Master." The Doctor replies.

"His assistant? Oh! The neighbor child!" The male companion offers.

"No! Neither of them!" The Doctor snaps, his accent slightly dropping in frustration.

"We'll have to ask... and old friend." The companions trade confused glances. As far as they know, there've literally been no other characters, in the original fanfilm, or the five minute sequel.

"Then who?" they ask in perfect, obviously rehearsed unison.

The Doctor turns around and looks directly into the camera. "You'll have to find out!"

Credits roll over a NeonVisual credits sequence, and the screen is filled with the words:

COMING SOON, PROBABLY:

THE AUTON STRATAGEM – THE UNNAMED SEQUEL